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# **Runholding in the Wakatipu Basin 1900-1950**

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## *Abstract*

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The pastoral high country, encompassing the tussock-clad hill and mountain lands running down the backbone of the South Island of New Zealand, has since the mid-1800s been the domain of vast Crown pastoral runs producing most of the nation's fine-wool. The men who held and ran these properties were, and still are, commonly known as runholders. Lake Wakatipu, and the rugged, mountainous land surrounding its shores, forms part of this high country geography. This thesis examines the practice of runholding in the Wakatipu basin between 1900 and 1950. It considers the many inter-relationships between the economic, social, environmental and political aspects of runholding.

The history of twentieth century runholding is often viewed dichotomously - of an exploitative, inefficient, and sometimes negligent phase up until the passing of the 1948 Land Act and a more prosperous and sustainable era thereafter. Using various primary archival sources that provide information on over twenty high county stations in the Wakatipu, this thesis explores some of these assumptions. It reveals that runholding was frequently rendered unprofitable through environmental and economic shocks. Throughout the period, the underlying factors of climate, geography and ecology formed the basis of runholding's marginality as a form of land use and livelihood. This study shows that while the runs and runholders of the Wakatipu shared many similarities, hardships and successes, there was often considerable variability in the fortunes of different properties.

## *Acknowledgements*

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I would like to extend my greatest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Tom Brooking and co-supervisor, Dr Rani Kerin for their valuable guidance and suggestions and to my parents and family for their support and interest. My appreciation must also be extended to the following: the administrative staff in the History Department; the staff of the Hocken Library and the Dunedin office of Archives New Zealand; Iris and Kate Scott of Rees Valley Station, Glenorchy, for hosting me and allowing me to read some of their family's station diaries; Murray Mackenzie and the staff of Land Information New Zealand, Christchurch, for providing access to the Wakatipu Pastoral Run License Files; Fletcher Challenge Ltd. for permission to access the National Mortgage and Agency Company and the Wright Stephenson and Company records; the Otago Southland Employers' Association for access to the Otago and Southland Sheep Owners' Union minute books; Karen Swaine of the Lakes District Museum; and to Tracey and my fellow post-grads at 99 Albany Street for their encouragement and assistance. I must also acknowledge the contribution of the late Peter Chandler, whose invaluable collection of research papers laid the foundation for this study.

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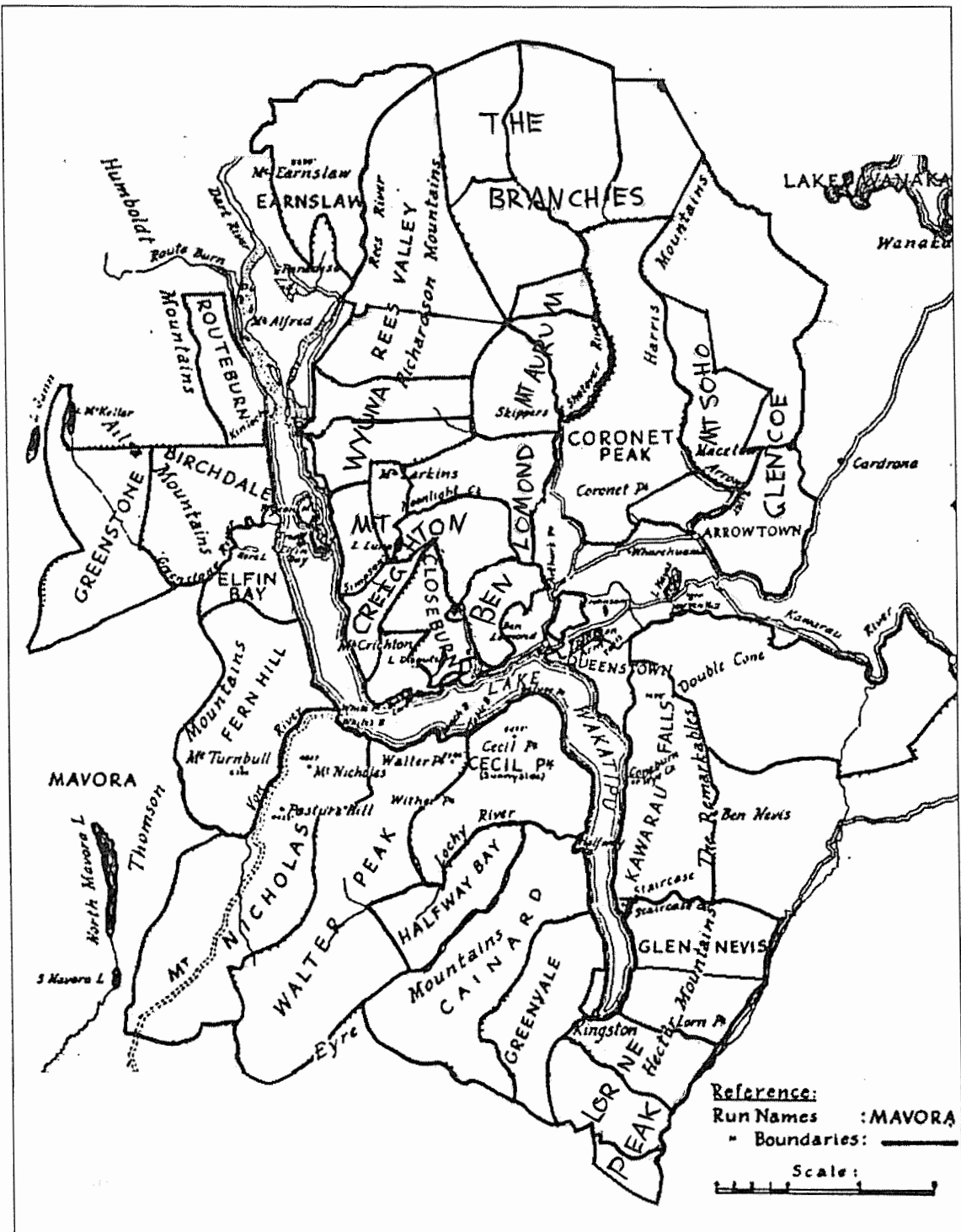
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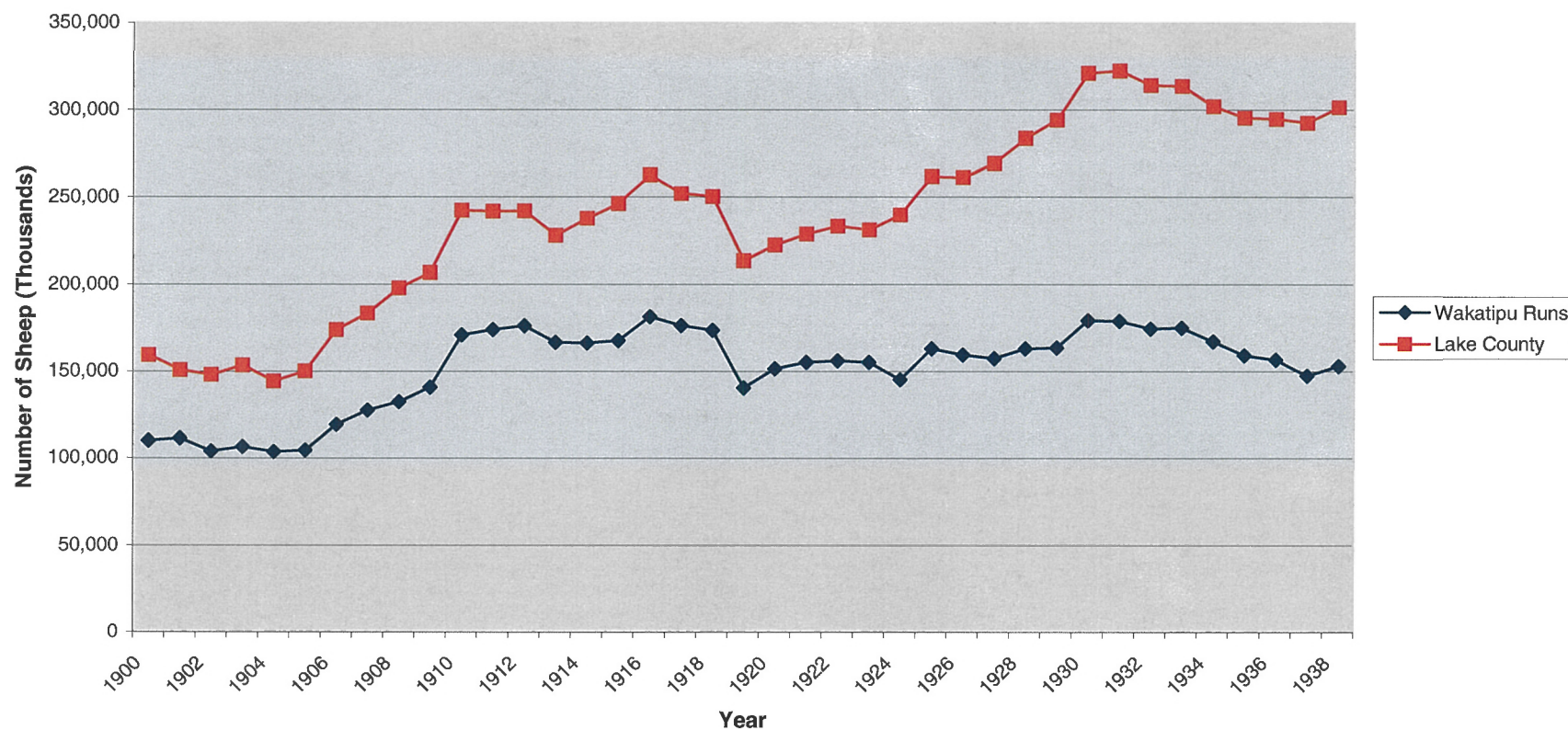


Map 1

### Map of the Pastoral Runs of the Wakatipu

Map taken from Florence Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, (Dunedin: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1947). Annotated by the author.

## Wakatipu Runs and Lake County Sheep Numbers 1900-1938

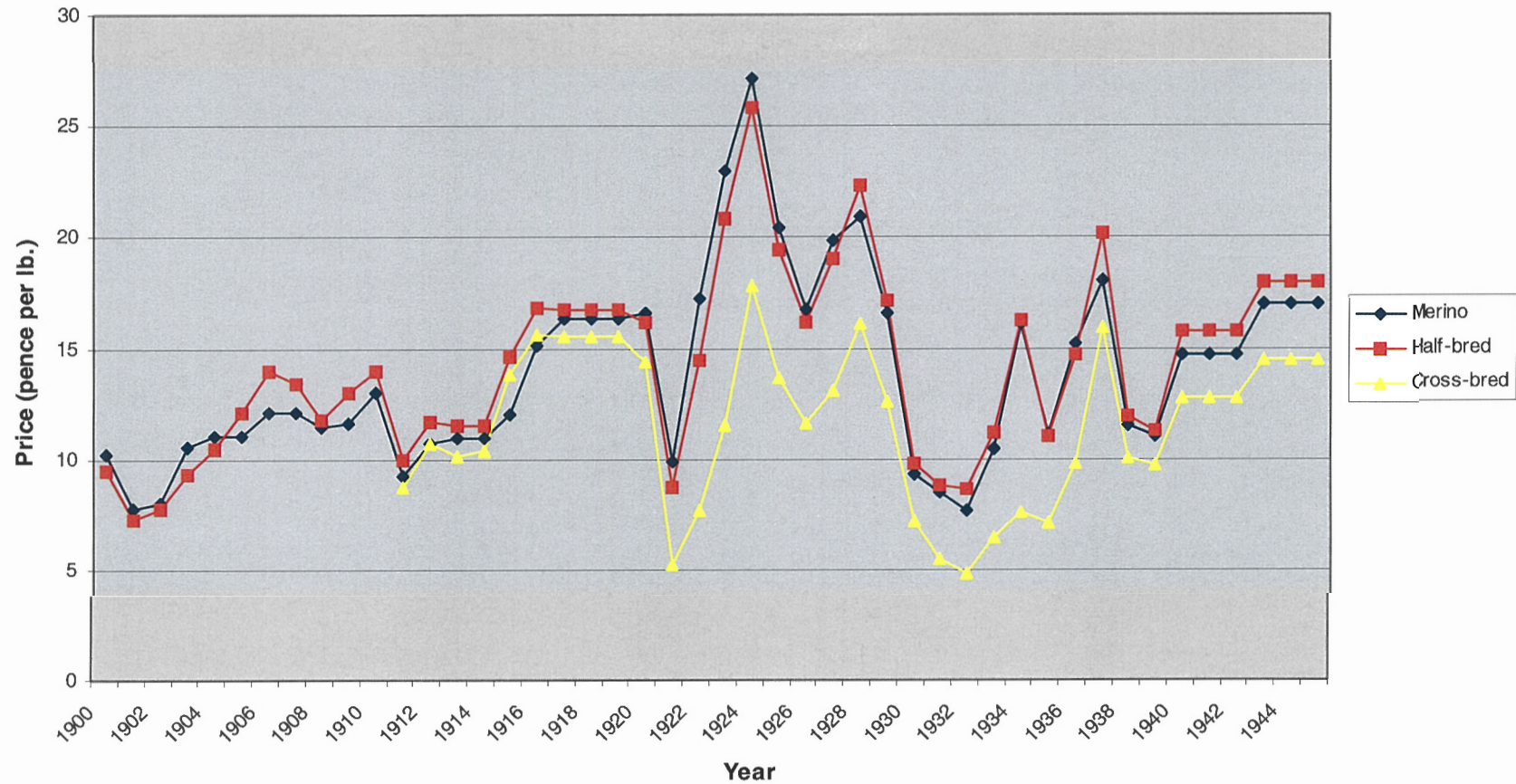


**Figure 1**

The 'Wakatipu Runs' series is based on individual sheep returns from 23 pastoral runs in the Wakatipu. Unfortunately, data for individual runs is incomplete after 1938. Sourced from 'Annual Sheep Returns', *AJHR*, H-23B, 1900-1930 and 'Sheep Returns, 1931-1938 – Lands and Survey Department Records', Run Diary, Peter Chandler Research Papers, (MS-1270-2-3/002), Hocken Library.



### Average Price (pence per lb.) for Wool Graded 'Medium to Good' 1900-1945



**Figure 2**

Years 1900-1910 from Llyod Prichard, *An Economic History of New Zealand to 1939*, 206 (Figures for Cross-bred wool unavailable)

Years 1911-1912 from *New Zealand Official Year Book*, 1911 and 1913, 544, 576

Years 1913-1945 from *Statistical Review of the Sheep Farming Industry of New Zealand*, Volume I, 65.



# Introduction

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No sector of New Zealand's rural society is surrounded with more mystique and romantic legend than the woolgrowers and sheep farmers of the South Island high country. The image and ideal of the high country and those who inhabit it are still a significant part of New Zealand's cultural heritage. Its popular image is frequently evoked in everyday New Zealand society from writers and artists to advertisers and marketers. As Alex Wearing observed, the powerful imagery attached to the South Island high country has equivalents with the Australian Outback or the American Frontier.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, as anthropologist Michele Dominy suggested, this is due to the high country being, 'the last preserve of a colonial legacy of New Zealand pioneer-derived rurality'.<sup>2</sup> Many station practices and routines remain largely unchanged from the 'pioneer' phase of New Zealand's development. Whereas farming in New Zealand has undergone radical changes over its history, the high country, occupying the most ecologically and climatically marginal farming land, has not always been suited to modern technology and agricultural science. Or perhaps it is the sheer scale of their operations. One cannot but be impressed when looking at the towering face of The Remarkables, or standing on the wharf at Queenstown, to look across Lake Wakatipu at the craggy tops of Cecil and Walter Peaks to know that sheep have been depastured among those precipitous mountains since the early 1860s. And further, that this undertaking has been achieved by a relatively small number of people who had to be as tough and resilient as the Merino sheep they ran.

With the exception of the gold rush of the 1860s, for over a century the predominant form of land use on the high country surrounding Lake Wakatipu was fine wool growing on Crown pastoral leasehold runs. This study aims to examine this practice of runholding during the first half of the twentieth century. It will take a multi-dimensional approach by considering the inter-relationship between the economic, social, environmental and political aspects of runholding between 1900 and 1950.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Wearing, 'Plants, People and Landscapes: changes in and prospects for the vegetation of Central Otago and Upper Waitaki drylands', (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 1998), 248.

<sup>2</sup> Michele Dominy, *Calling the Station Home: Place and Identity in New Zealand's High Country*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2001), 2.

## **The Wakatipu Basin**

More than any other factor the physical and geographical environment in which high country families lived and worked has dictated the practice of runholding in the Wakatipu. At 77 kilometres in length, and up to 5.5 km wide, Lake Wakatipu is the longest lake in New Zealand and the second largest lake in the South Island. The geology and geography of the Wakatipu Basin has been the product of tremendous tectonic forces and extensive glaciation. The same forces that thrust up the Southern Alps formed the various mountain ranges of the region. Over tens of thousands of years successive periods of glaciation scoured out the lake's long 'S' shaped trench. The glacier gouged so deep that over much of its length the lakebed is well below sea level. Tongues of ice from the Wakatipu glacier also extended into the Arrow Basin, excavating its valley floor. On all sides of the lake relatively barren glaciated mountains rise steeply from its shores. The Wakatipu's main tributaries, the Dart and Rees Rivers enter at the lake's northern end, while its only outlet is via the Kawarau River at the eastern end of the Frankton arm. Fed by alpine rivers sourced from glaciers and snowmelt, Lake Wakatipu remains cold all year round. Punctuating the western shoreline at various intervals emerge the lake's smaller tributaries, the Greenstone, Von, and Lochy, valleys. These too exhibit the similar glaciated landscape of classical 'U' shaped troughs with precipitous chasms and gorges throughout their length. At the foot of the lake lies the terminal moraine and large outwash plain of the ancient glacier.

Lake Wakatipu is the central point of the study region in which no less than twenty high country stations, spread over at least seven mountain ranges, are situated (Map 1).<sup>3</sup> Most run boundaries are defined by natural features such as rivers, gorges and mountain ranges. At the head of the lake, Mt Earnslaw and Rees Valley are the northern most runs. Proceeding down the eastern shore of the lake, Wyuna, Mt

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<sup>3</sup> The terms 'run' and 'station' have varied in meaning and their usage over time. For the purpose of this study, a 'run' refers to the legally defined area of pastoral leasehold land, denoted by a number, and held under pastoral license or lease. Some runs were worked singly, eg. Mt Earnslaw (run No. 19), while others were combined. The Branches Station, for example, was composed of four runs (Nos. 17, 20, 21, 22). The term 'Station' on the other hand refers to the whole working property, including the leasehold run (or runs), any area of freehold, the stock, the homestead and working plant, such as a shearing shed, yards and huts.

Creighton, Closeburn and Ben Lomond occupy the shoreline between Glenorchy and Queenstown. These runs extend back to the Shotover River where they adjoin Mt Aurum and The Branches in the Shotover headwaters. On the eastern side of the Shotover lies Coronet Peak Station, beginning at the foot of the Arrow Basin in the south and stretching north into the Harris Mountains where it joins The Branches. Across the Arrow River, lie Mt Soho and Glencoe Stations, the eastern most runs included in this study. The Remarkable and Hector Mountains define the eastern boundary of the Lake Wakatipu's southern arm, taking in Kawarau Falls and Glen Nevis Stations. Beyond Kingston, the Mataura River acts as the southern boundary of Lorne Peak, Greenvale and Cainard Stations. These are the southern most runs in the study area, spanning across the Kingston terminal moraine from the Hector to Eyre Mountains. Halfway Bay and Cecil Peak Stations then occupy the remainder of the western shore of Wakatipu's southern arm. The large runs of Walter Peak and Mt Nicholas, amongst the Eyre Mountains, take up much of the southwest of the study area. Finally, along the north-western shore of Lake Wakatipu are Elfin Bay, Greenstone, Birchdale and Routeburn runs, situated in the bush-clad, semi-alpine Greenstone and Caples valleys.

Situated slightly east of the Southern Alps, the Wakatipu region is in a climatically mixed zone. With a mean annual rainfall of around 800mm, it is wetter than the semi-arid Central Otago but considerably drier than Fiordland to the west. Regional variations see Glenorchy receive more rain than Queenstown while it gets progressively drier as one heads east down the Kawarau Gorge. It is also a region prone to severe winters, although they have become less frequent over the later half of the twentieth century. More than any other climatic factor, snow was the runholders' greatest fear. Blizzards could affect the region unevenly, but all the Wakatipu runs carried a considerable snow-risk. Between 1900 and 1950 heavy snowfalls typically occurred on a five to seven year cycle.<sup>4</sup> The isolation of the region from the main centres, and the difficulty of accessing the runs were further drawbacks. The roads from Queenstown to Kingston and from Queenstown to Glenorchy were built in the mid-1930s and the early 1960s respectively. Roads remained practically non-existent

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<sup>4</sup> At least nine heavy snowfalls fell between 1900 and 1950.

on the western shore of Lake Wakatipu.<sup>5</sup> Access to the Skippers runs, particularly Mt Aurum and The Branches, still remains via a perilous road, prone to snow, slips and washouts all year round. For most of the lakeside stations, the lake steamers were the sole means of transport for bringing in station supplies and labour, freighting stock and sending out wool.

### **The Historiography of the High Country**

Although farming has occupied a prominent position in New Zealand's economic development, rural history remains a greatly under developed field. It is ironic that even though New Zealand is an overwhelmingly urban society, attempts to define our national identity invariably contain many notions of rurality.<sup>6</sup> At present there is still no general work providing an overview of New Zealand's farming history or the development of rural society in general, much less one covering the pastoral high country. Nevertheless a myriad of popular books have been written on various aspects of high country life, most in a celebratory manner and from the human-interest or romantic pioneer viewpoint. Books written by runholders or their families, of which there are several from the Wakatipu, mainly function to recount experiences and preserve memories.<sup>7</sup>

Scholarly work on the high country is also well established but its coverage is patchy and uneven. General histories of New Zealand tend to discuss runholders or 'squatters' in so far as they were the first European occupiers of great tracts of land

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<sup>5</sup> The Mackenzies of Walter Peak Station built several roads across their properties, mostly from their own funds and by hand.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Claudia Bell, *Inventing New Zealand: everyday myths of Pakeha identity*, (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996). Australians also draw upon ruralist ideals, mainly in terms of the bush and the outback, in their national consciousness. See: Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> D.G. Jardine of Remarkables Station gives the best description of the yearly high country routine in *Shadows on the Hill: The Remarkables Station*, Queenstown (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1978); Terri Macnicol's *Beyond the Skippers Road*, (Wellington: Reed, 1968) tells of the difficulties of raising a family on the isolated Mt Aurum Station in the 1940s; G.L. Burdon recounts his time at Mt Creighton Station between 1922 and 1928 in *Tall Hills and Tight Lines*, (Wanaka: G.L. Burdon, 1985) Chapter 5; Hugh Mackenzie, *Memories of Walter Peak, Mt Nicholas and Fernhill Stations: the true history taken mainly from the diaries of the late Hugh Mackenzie! Compiled by Catherine Jean Baker*, (Timaru: C.J. Baker, 1992).

and, as such, the ascendant landholders in nineteenth century South Island.<sup>8</sup> Post-1890s (or post-refrigeration) rural history is generally portrayed as the triumph of the family farm, as the large freehold estates and pastoral leaseholds deemed suitable for closer settlement were split up. From this point the burgeoning meat and dairy industries assume more importance than wool (if only in a symbolic rather than monetary sense). Runholders, being steadily pushed back inland and confined to the high, isolated and marginal hill and mountain country, largely disappear from the historical narrative.

Provincial and centennial histories, where relevant, deal with runholding but naturally only in a regional setting and usually focus on the runholders' role as the pioneer settlers of the district.<sup>9</sup> The place of runholders in the context of the colonial wealthy has attracted some attention with Steven Eldred-Grigg, Jim McAloon and Fergus Sinclair dealing with this topic.<sup>10</sup> Aspects of runholding and pastoralism have also been the subjects of several student postgraduate theses. Yvonne Spiers examined the Preston family's runholding fortunes in the Maniototo and Mackenzie Country over a sixty-year period, while Marilyn Campbell provided an overview of the first three decades of pastoralism in Otago and Southland.<sup>11</sup> Others have looked at the history of station management, pastoral tenure, vegetation change, and the impact of rabbits and major snowstorms.<sup>12</sup>

By far the most well-known and celebrated works on runholding history come from L.G.D Acland, Robert Pinney, W.H. Scotter, James Herries Beattie and Peter

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<sup>8</sup> Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, revised ed., (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2000), 96-97; 162-163; Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 197.

<sup>9</sup> See F.W.G. Miller, *Golden Days in Lake County*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, (Christchurch: Whitcoulls Ltd, 1973) Chapter 2; Florence Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1947).

<sup>10</sup> Steven Eldred Grigg, *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders who inherited the earth*, (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1980); Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840-1914*, (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002); Fergus Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking: A History of Dunedin's "Inner Circle"', (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Yvonne Spiers 'Preston Runholding in the Maniototo and Mackenzie 1878-1917', (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1987); Marilyn Campbell 'Runholding in Otago and Southland 1848-1876', (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Peden, 'Sheep Farming Practice in Colonial Canterbury 1834 to 1882,' (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2002); Ann Walls, 'Land Tenure in the Canterbury High Country', (Msc Thesis, Victoria University, 1966); Wearing, 'Plants, People and Landscapes'; Rachel Egerton, 'Unconquerable enemy or bountiful resource?: a new perspective on the rabbit in Central Otago', (BA (Hons.) Thesis, University of Otago, 1993); Julian Kuzma, 'The 1895 Snowstorm', (BA (Hons.) Thesis, University of Otago, 1999).

Chandler. Between them, these men have documented the (principally nineteenth century) history of sheep runs in Canterbury, Otago and Southland.<sup>13</sup> These studies are regionalised and provide useful historical and chronological outlines of the runs and those who held and worked them. All are invaluable sources of information on people, places and events but some, such as Herries-Beattie, are quite diffuse, muddled and read more like an extensive collection of notes rather than a scholarly work. Little is done to contextualise the place of runholding in colonial New Zealand or to draw out broader economic and social trends and patterns in pastoralism or among runholding society.

Nor has there been a great deal of scholarship on the place of the pastoral service industries, in particular the role of the vitally important stock and station agent. On individual companies, apart from several company-commissioned centennial publications, there is nothing in New Zealand historiography of comparable analytical depth to J.D. Bailey's history of the Australian Land and Mercantile Finance Company.<sup>14</sup> At the broader level, Simon Ville has most recently made an important contribution to stock and station history with his book *The Rural Entrepreneurs*, which charts the evolution of this quintessentially Australasian institution.<sup>15</sup> His perspective, however, is mainly institutional - one of company structures, strategies, competition and co-operation. In other words, it is largely a view from the boardroom down. By using stock agencies' records, primarily those of the National Mortgage and Agency Company of New Zealand (N.M.A), this study will give a glimpse of the relationship between the runholder and agent and how company policies directly affected their clients from the farm gate up.

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<sup>13</sup> See L.G.D Acland, *The Early Canterbury Runs*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Christchurch: Whitcoulls and Tombs, 1975); Robert Pinney, *Early Northern Otago Runs*, (Auckland: William Collins, 1981) and *Early South Canterbury Runs*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971); W.H. Scotter, *Run, Estate and Farm: a history of the Kakanui and Waiaireka valleys, North Otago*, (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1978); James Herries Beattie, *The Southern Runs*, (Invercargill: Southland Times for the Gore Historical Society, 1979); Peter Chandler, *Glenaray: Waikaia-Southland*, (Invercargill: Craig Printing and W. Pickney Ltd., 1984) and *Land of the Mountain and the Flood: a contribution to the history of runs and runholders of the Wakatipu district*, (Queenstown: Queenstown and District Historical Society for the Hocken Library, 1996). North Island pastoralism is covered by A.G. Bagnall, *Wairarapa: an historical excursion*, (Masterton: Hedley's Bookshop for the Masterton Trust Lands Trust, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Two such examples are Gordon Parry, *N.M.A. The Story of its First 100 Years*, (Dunedin: National Mortgage and Agency Co., 1964); John A. Angus, *Donald Reid Otago Farmers Ltd.* (Dunedin: Donald Reid Otago Farmers, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Simon Ville, *The Rural Entrepreneurs: A History of the Stock and Station Agent Industry in Australia and New Zealand*, (Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Perhaps the most developed academic field in relation to runholding concerns its most controversial aspect – the dramatic ecological and environmental impact of pastoralism on the high country's vegetation and soil.<sup>16</sup> Scholarship ranges from the purely scientific to that which considers the relationship between the depletion of the tussock grasslands and the history of pastoral production, economics, pastoral legislation and administration, pests and weeds, and agricultural science. Among the latter group, Professor Kevin O'Connor, former director of The Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute, has been one of the most astute observers and prolific commentators.<sup>17</sup> His work will be the primary reference point for this study's discussions on the environmental consequences of pastoralism in the Wakatipu.

It is apparent from this survey that one of the primary values of a study such as this is to compensate for the overly nineteenth century-centric viewpoint of the existing literature on runholding. As mentioned earlier this is perhaps understandable given the economic prominence of runholding in the so-called 'golden age' of pastoralism. But what of those who followed? It is fair to say that much of the knowledge of twentieth century runholding is based on a certain mythology or an accepted common wisdom. This forms one of the main hypotheses of this thesis - that the period from the turn of the century to the early 1950s was runholding's 'dark ages' of frequent economic and climatic adversity, insecure tenure, a deteriorating resource base, labour shortages and rabbit and weed infestation. At the broadest level this study will closely examine some of these assumptions and identify economic, social, environmental and political change and continuity in the high country over this time.

In doing so it will ask several key questions: How economically viable was runholding between 1900 and 1950? How crucial were the role of stock and station agents in the operation of runs, particularly in economic downturns? What were the

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<sup>16</sup> Pastoralism's most infamous failure has been documented in Lance McCaskill's history of Marlborough's Molesworth Station: Lance W. McCaskill, *Molesworth*, revised edition, (Wellington: Reed, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> See for example, K.F., O'Connor 'The influence of science on the use of tussock grasslands', *Review: Journal of the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute*, no. 43, (1986), 15-78; K.F., O'Connor, 'The Use of Mountains: A Review of New Zealand Experience', in *The Land, Our Future: essays on land use and conservation in honour of Kenneth Cumberland*, A. Grant Anderson (ed.), (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980), 193-222.



key agents of social change in the high country and how did the social composition change over time? How did runholders deal with the consequences of earlier, injudicious farming methods and what were the ongoing environmental consequences of runholding between 1900 and 1950? How did environmental learning help runholders to mitigate against climatic shocks, such as snow, and improve pastoral management? How did pastoral tenure evolve between 1900 and 1950 and how did the administrative apparatus deal with runholders and the high country? What were the issues presented by runholders to various commissions of inquiry and how were their concerns received?

This thesis will contend that, in accordance with popular perception, runholding was, in many cases, an economically and ecologically marginal activity over the first half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, accounting for this state of affairs will reveal a considerably more complex story than suggested, and illustrate a degree of variability among the fortunes of runs and runholders. In other words, the common dualistic representation of a pre-1948 ‘dark age’ and a post-1948s ‘golden age’ of runholding is too one-dimensional. It will be argued that the causes of pastoralism’s marginality in the Wakatipu were driven by a combination of tightly inter-twined factors. Some, such as geographical, climatic and economic circumstances, were beyond farmers’ control and try as they might, little could be done to offset their effects; others reflected a lack of environmental understanding or an over-estimation of ecological potential; and some were the consequences of a pastoral tenure system that did not promote the best interests of either the runholder or the land.

## **Sources and Methodology**

Central Otago historian Peter Chandler began in the 1960s and 1970s the process of collecting information on the early Wakatipu runs and runholding families. It appears that Chandler had initially envisaged his work to be an equivalent to the regional run histories of Acland and Pinney. This was eventually scaled back to a history of the runs and runholders at the head of Lake Wakatipu. Regrettably he passed away before his exhaustive and meticulous research was completed. In 1996 a copy of an almost complete manuscript was edited and published in book form as *Land of the Mountain*

*and the Flood*.<sup>18</sup> In addition to this useful monograph his research notes of run and runholder information were deposited in the Hocken library and provide a solid base for this study to build upon.

Apart from the Chandler material, this study draws heavily upon the official Pastoral Run License (PRL) files for each station, a source not available to earlier run historians. All the pastoral runs in the Wakatipu were held under Crown pastoral license and administered by provincial land boards. As the study area encompassed both the Otago and Southland land districts, two land boards administered the Wakatipu Basin.<sup>19</sup> Contained within each PRL file is a wealth of information relating to that particular run. This includes correspondence between the runholder, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, government ministers and officials, stock and station agencies and reports from Crown rangers and field inspectors. Pastoral licenses only gave runholders the right to graze the land. Applications to do nearly everything else had to be filed with the district Land Board. This included applications to transfer, extend or surrender pastoral licenses and to sow grass or fodder crops and burn tussock. One drawback to these sources, however, was that more paperwork, and therefore more information about a run, tended to be generated on the less economic holdings and particularly in times of adversity. The result is that we know considerably more about some stations than others.<sup>20</sup>

Although half a dozen stock and station agencies were represented in the Wakatipu, only the National Mortgage and Agency Company's records are comprehensive enough to allow one to trace the Company's activities in the region over nearly the entire period. In true rural tradition, runholders tended to remain with a single company and even some properties continued to be serviced by one Company through different owners. Sufficient material from other stock agencies, however, is contained

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*.

<sup>19</sup> The Southland Land District extended from the Greenstone River south along the western shore of Lake Wakatipu to Kingston taking in the following runs in the study – Elfin Bay, Mt Nicholas, Walter Peak, Cecil Peak, Halfway Bay, Cainard, Greenvale and Lorne Peak. Those runs to the north of the Greenstone and east of Lake Wakatipu were part of the Otago Land District.

<sup>20</sup> For instance we know considerably more about the workings of Greenvale Station, which had ongoing problems over several owners, than Cecil Peak Station, owned by L.G.D. Acland for nearly thirty years. One can assume that Acland, a relatively wealthy Canterbury runholder and farmer, was better able to cope and absorb the losses accompanied with economic downturns and natural adversities and therefore less apt to request Crown assistance, than the successive owners of Greenvale who were heavily burdened with financial liabilities.

within the PRL files to gain a fuller picture of how various companies dealt with their pastoral clients.

The minute books of the Otago and Southland Sheepowners Industrial Union of Employers, and its Wakatipu sub-branch, are another greatly under utilised source for twentieth century runholding history. Both of these provide glimpses of how runholders acted collectively in the political arena to further the interests of their industry. The annual sheep returns in the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)* were invaluable for tracking flock numbers between 1900 and 1930.<sup>21</sup> The other essential sources within the *AJHR* were the reports of the Royal Commission on Crown Lands (1905), the Southern Pastoral Lands Commission (1921) and the Sheep-farming Industry Commissions (1939 and 1949). Local newspapers, the *Lake Wakatipu Mail* and the *Lake County Press*, also proved quite useful, particularly in reporting the evidence given to the above-mentioned commissions.

## Chapter Outline

For the purpose of narrative flow and to allow one to trace changes over time, this study is arranged chronologically, each chapter covering a single decade.

Chapter one provides an outline of early pastoralism in the Wakatipu from the 1860s to the turn of the century. It shows how the pattern of pastoral occupation and the experience of the early runholders mirrored that in other parts of the South Island high country. Drawing on the research of Peter Chandler, this information is synthesised with other existing knowledge of nineteenth century pastoralism in the Wakatipu and the wider South Island high country.

Chapter two examines runholding in the Wakatipu over the first two decades of the twentieth century. The 1905 Crown Lands Commission serves as a focal point in

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<sup>21</sup> The *AJHR* stops listing individual sheep-owners and their sheep numbers in 1930, instead only providing county information. Fortunately Peter Chandler was able to obtain sheep returns for most of the Wakatipu runs between 1931 and 1938. PRL files also periodically provide stock details right up to 1950.

discussions on tenure, environment, and pastoral subdivision. The two decades between 1900 and 1920 were notable for the entrance of a new generation of runholders, the impact of World War One on runholding families, labour and economics and the re-emergence of concerted rural trade unionism.

Chapter three looks at the comparatively turbulent decade of the 1920s. Once again the high country was the focus of an official enquiry. This time the 1920 Southern Pastoral Lands Commission, was set up to investigate the causes and possible remedies of the High Country's tussock land deterioration. Economically, some of the problems of the 1930s and 1940s had their genesis in this decade. Snow again played a major role. The winters of 1918, 1923, and to a lesser extent 1928, were some of the harshest in the Wakatipu since 1895. Yet snow was not the only threat to stock and the issue of kea predation on sheep became a significant economic and political issue for runholders.

Chapter four is primarily focused on the impact of the 1930s depression on runholders and wool growing. The first half examines the impact of low wool prices on farm economics, how runholders responded to the fall in prices, and the attitude of the Crown, stock and station agencies, and mortgagors towards the plight of high country farmers. The second half of the chapter will look at the process of recovery and rehabilitation and illustrate how, in some cases, the depression called into question the viability of pastoralism. Finally the longer term economic, environmental and social impacts of the slump that carried on well into the following decade will be assessed.

Chapter five takes the story to the end of the 1940s. The ongoing legacies of the 1930s, fixed wool prices and labour shortages were some of the decades defining features. The 1949 Royal Commission on the Sheep Farming Industry serves as the concluding bookend of this study. By this stage the high country farmers had become more of a concerted political force through the mechanisms of the High Country Divisions of Federated Farmers and the High Country Committee. Many of the same issues, albeit under different circumstances, were raised in the late 1940s as in the Crown Lands Commission forty-five years earlier – insecurity of tenure, labour shortages, and tussock land deterioration and erosion continued to be unresolved

issues. But there were also new challenges, in particular surrounding the standard of living in the high country amidst a technologically developing world.

The 1949 Commission offers a convenient and logical finishing point. Post-1950 is commonly seen as the start of a new era in pastoral history. The 1948 Land Act overhauled the pastoral leasehold tenure; the Korean War wool boom of the early 1950s transformed the fortunes of wool-growers almost over night and made money available for investment; and the use of aerial top-dressing and over-sowing brought a new level of productivity to tussock lands previously considered not suitable for improvement.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Wakatipu Runholding in the Nineteenth Century

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The beginnings of pastoral farming in Otago was bound up with the settlement begun by the Otago Association, a body linked with the Free Church of Scotland and formed under the aegis of the New Zealand Company, the brainchild of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his theories of systematic colonisation. Wakefield's prescription, as elaborated in Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury and Otago, envisaged concentrated agricultural settlements, with land restricted to those with capital through the mechanism of the 'sufficient price'. Landowners would employ wage-earning agricultural labourers to work their properties, who in turn would eventually, through saving, be able to purchase their own small freeholds. Expansive sheep farming or squatting, with its dispersed settlements and the cultural crudeness it engendered, went against the basic economic and social principles of Wakefield's theory. But as the New Zealand Company settlements and the large-scale agricultural system faltered through lack of labour, capital and resident land purchasers and the Company itself verged on bankruptcy, sheep farming was the obvious alternative. It was relatively inexpensive, requiring less labour; it was more suited to the land, particularly in the hinterlands of the Canterbury and Otago settlements; and Britain provided an almost guaranteed export market for wool. In Canterbury, pastoral settlement spread rapidly after the Canterbury Association threw open the Canterbury Block for selection in 1851. All available land along the coast, over the plains and into the low hills was taken up by 1855. By the mid-1860s, as explorers penetrated into the Mackenzie Country and inland Canterbury, every acre worth stocking, right back to the main divide, was included in a run.<sup>1</sup>

Pastoralism in Otago followed a similar pattern. The Otago Association's desire for a controlled settlement, expanding slowly outwards in accordance with immigration and the surveying of the Otago Block into Hundreds, and limited to those who bought land, was confronted by demands for rights of pasturage over the vast inland areas

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<sup>1</sup> Acland, *The Early Canterbury Runs*, 13; William Vance, *High Endeavor: The story of the Mackenzie Country* (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1980), 26-38.

suitable for grazing sheep. Although Captain Cargill ‘clung to the Wakefieldian ideal of achieving a balance between agricultural and pastoral farming’, the surrender of the New Zealand Company’s charter in 1849, and the control of its lands reverting to the Crown, was the final blow to the Association. In 1851, Otago was brought under the provisions of the Ordinance of 1849, which had hitherto been limited to the Province of New Ulster.<sup>2</sup> A Commissioner of Crown Lands was appointed to grant runs up to an estimated carrying capacity of 25,000 sheep. Grazing licenses were for fourteen years, and carried an annual license fee of £5 pounds for up to 5,000 sheep. As A.H. McLintock said, ‘these exceptionally favourable terms which were available to all-comers destroyed the last hopes McGlashan and Cargill might have held of maintaining the exclusive character of the settlement in those pastoral regions beyond the boundaries of the Otago Block.’<sup>3</sup>

Freed from these restraints, pastoralism spread rapidly across Otago. Naturally, the unoccupied land closest to existing settlements on the East Coast was taken up first. By 1856, the lowland runs of North Otago had been claimed, as had coastal areas of South Otago and Southland. Wealthy entrepreneurs, speculators and companies, then ‘leap-frogged deeper and deeper inland in search of unoccupied grazing lands.’<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1858, all the good, available runs had been claimed right up the Waitaki, and into the Maniototo, Manuherikia, Lindis and Wanaka districts.<sup>5</sup> As runs were selected and stocked, the Province’s sheep numbers increased dramatically. In 1854 Otago had 52,000 sheep, by 1859 that number had swelled to 290,000 sheep grazing on 112 runs. Between 1859 and 1861 the flock again doubled in size.<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of Europeans on the shores of Lake Wakatipu marked the final stages of this decade long process of rapid pastoral expansion in Otago and Southland. Only fully explored by Europeans in the late 1850s, the Wakatipu district was one of the last frontiers of the squatter. Like other areas of the South Island high country, the early history of runholding in the Wakatipu basin was typically haphazard, speculative and unstable. There was often no difference between the explorer and

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<sup>2</sup> A.H. McLintock, *The History of Otago*, (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1975), 340.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 341.

<sup>4</sup> Erik Olssen, *A History of Otago*, (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1984), 52.

<sup>5</sup> Pinney, *Early Northern Otago Runs*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Olssen, 51.



prospective runholder. Most of the initial forays by Europeans into the Wakatipu area (all from the lake's southern end) were by men looking for unoccupied pastoral country. By 1859 seven parties had visited the lake's southern reaches, but only a few had advanced any great distance up the lake.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, by the time of the major Wakatipu gold discoveries in 1861-62, several runs along the shores of Lake Wakatipu had been selected and stocked. Four runs, totalling over 285,000 acres along the eastern shore of the lake, were held by the celebrated partnership of Grant, Maitland and Rees; at Kingston, W.S. Trotter held 'Greenvale' (No. 323); the White Brothers occupied 'Mt Nicholas' (No. 324); and Rees's fellow explorer, Nicholas Von Tunzelman, held the 'Fern Hill' run (No. 350) north of the Von river, on the western shore of the lake.

### **Land Tenure and Occupation**

The tenure of pastoral lands in Otago, at the time the first Wakatipu runs were selected, was defined under regulations proclaimed in February 1856. Essentially they were largely unchanged from those of 1851. Runs, whose details such as boundaries and estimates of acreage were mainly provided by the applicants, were numbered, and granted in return for an annual fee and a tax per 1,000 head of livestock over an initial 5,000. Tenure was far from secure and could not be termed as leasehold but rather as grazing rights for a period of normally 14 years. These rights could be cancelled at any time, without compensation, should the run be required for closer settlement.<sup>8</sup> Nothing prevented a person holding more than one run except that the Waste Lands Boards had to be satisfied the run was sufficiently stocked – often difficult in the 1850s and 1860s when sheep, particularly breeding stock, were scarce and had to be imported mainly from Australia.<sup>9</sup>

The discovery of gold in the Arrow and Shotover rivers in 1861-62 and the subsequent declaration of the Wakatipu Goldfield fundamentally altered the social, economic and political environment in which large-scale pastoralism could be carried

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<sup>7</sup> Jardine, *Shadows on the Hill: The Remarkables Station Queenstown*, 155.

<sup>8</sup> The licensee did, however, possess a pre-emptive right to freehold 80 acres for a homestead and 10 acres for each out-station erected on the run.

<sup>9</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 11-13.



**Fig. (1.1)**

William Gilbert Rees (top) and Nicholas Von Tunzelman (bottom)  
Rees and Von Tunzelman reached Lake Wakatipu by the east in 1860. The partnership of  
Grant, Gammie-Maitland and Rees, briefly held four runs totalling 285,000 acres. Von  
Tunzelman took up the Fern Hill run on the western shore of the lake.

Originals: Lakes District Museum

Source: Julia Bradshaw, *Arrowtown: History and Walks*, (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001),

out in the Wakatipu. Grazing leases were cancelled; thousands of miners swarmed across land once occupied only by sheep, and further opportunities for pastoral growth were seriously curtailed. Most crucially, the balance of political favour shifted firmly away from the runholder and towards the miner. Between 1862 and 1874 extensive (running over 5,000 sheep) and dedicated wool farming was limited to half a dozen stations, on generally non-auriferous land, situated around the shores of Lake Wakatipu – Kawarau Falls, Greenvale, Mt Nicholas, Fernhill and North Station. Large areas within the gold fields, particularly up the Shotover, were not open to extensive grazing, except within the limits of the goldfields regulations. Commonages were reserved for the stock of miners and townspeople, but no area was available for the man who wished to graze large numbers of sheep or cattle on the waste land within a goldfield.

The first attempt to make use of this generally non-auriferous country came in 1867 when the Provincial Government attempted to publicly auction depasturing licenses for nineteen Wakatipu runs within the Otago Gold Field. This was prevented however as central government did not think it desirable to create exclusive rights on a goldfield where run leases had previously been cancelled. Instead another system of grazing rights – or ‘glorified commonage’ – was instituted in 1868 under the control of a Board of Wardens. Perhaps acknowledging the inferior tenure on offer, annual grazing fees per head of stock were levied at half the rate as those on other pastoral occupiers in Otago.<sup>10</sup>

The control of the Board of Wardens lasted until 1874. As sheep flocks grew, so did dissatisfaction among the runholders. The failure of the Board to follow natural features when dividing sheep and cattle blocks, and the absence of boundary fences allowed flocks to become boxed. In 1873 John Wither recorded sheep from six flocks other than his own when drafted in the Sunnyside yards.<sup>11</sup> A Commission of Inquiry sat in Queenstown in April 1873, where, along with complaints over the unsatisfactory state of administration, it heard allegations of sheep stealing and ‘picking-up’ – the practice of gathering stray sheep when driving a mob for shearing

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<sup>10</sup> *Otago Provincial Government Gazette (OPGG)*, October 15, No. 574, 1868, 323.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Chandler, ‘Shotover: a history’, unpublished manuscript, Manuscripts and Related Research: Wakatipu Runs Histories and Shotover: A History, (MS-1270-1-5/003) Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

or sale. At the Commission's recommendation a fresh subdivision of the Wakatipu runs was drawn up, 'using natural boundaries whenever possible', but still reserving several areas of commonage.<sup>12</sup> The regulations for the twenty-three runs, auctioned at Queenstown in March 1874, and another nine in May 1876, continued to reflect the mining-centric view of the Provincial Government. Clauses allowed miners to graze their horses and cattle and to take up mining claims or residence. Leases were for seven years, no right of renewal was allowed for and the only compensation for improvements was half the cost of any fencing the runholder may have erected.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless this did not deter bidding, and grossly inflated rentals, averaging £330 per annum, were secured for the runs.

## **Class, Background and Wealth of Nineteenth Century Wakatipu Runholders**

Changes in land tenure dictated to a degree the settlement patterns of the Wakatipu high country. The auctions of the 1870s marked an important juncture in the Wakatipu high country, introducing a new group of runholders into the region. Much of the recent historiography regarding nineteenth century runholders has tended to focus on the most successful and wealthy pastoralists and their position within colonial society. Debate has centred on the question of whether the early South Island runholders attempted to re-create an 'aristocratic tradition' in New Zealand or that the most wealthy pastoralists constituted a 'southern gentry.' Steven Eldred-Grigg's book, *A Southern Gentry*, as the title suggests, has done the most to perpetuate the myth that the pastoralists of the South Island were a landed gentry, of upper and upper-middle class English origins, and who controlled most of the wealth and power of the south.<sup>14</sup>

Fergus Sinclair's doctoral thesis on the commercial elite in Dunedin between 1860 and 1890 also examines this question. In looking at the pastoralists, however, Sinclair adopts a different methodology, taking those Otago and Southland runholders and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid; *OPGG*, No. 872, September 17, 1873, 340.

<sup>13</sup> *OPGG*, No. 897, March 5, 1874, 81-82.

<sup>14</sup> Eldred Grigg, *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders who inherited the earth*, (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1980).

partnerships that owned more than 5,000 sheep in 1870, and tracing their fortunes over the next nineteen years. Sinclair is more hesitant in his conclusions, claiming that it is difficult to generalise about the backgrounds of runholders who owned large flocks. Nonetheless some patterns are apparent and generally do not fit with Eldred-Grigg's thesis of a landed gentry.

Firstly, very few landowners fit into Eldred-Grigg's upper class stratum, although military officers or their sons form a small category that corresponds to his 'upper middle-class'.<sup>15</sup> Fergus Sinclair identified nine families that were connected with the Indian Army and six runholders who were sons of English clerics. Two of those landowners were in the Wakatipu district.<sup>16</sup> Sinclair's second conclusion is that the core of the runholding class in 1870 might be termed as middle class, but trying to divide it into upper and lower is difficult. Few of this middle stratum of woolgrowers had farming family backgrounds. Sinclair assumes that this reflected a belief that runholding might supply quick profits, rather than a desire to achieve 'gentry' status through land ownership in New Zealand.<sup>17</sup> Finally, there were certainly more landowners from the 'lower-class', or at least on the margins of middle-class, than Eldred-Grigg has acknowledged.<sup>18</sup>

Another myth that Sinclair, and others, find little evidence to support is the existence of 'dynasties of wealth'. On the contrary, there was a very high attrition rate among colonial pastoralists. Only one-third of the large sheep owners identified in 1870 were still present in 1890. Sixty-five Otago runholders are known to have been foreclosed, or become insolvent, as opposed to thirty-eight who left estates of £10,000 or more.<sup>19</sup> This pattern is evident in the Wakatipu. In 1870 six runholders had flocks over 5,000. By 1889, only W.S. Trotter of Greenvale remained. Even those large runholders who managed to operate for two decades or more, such as John Butement (1866-87) and

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<sup>15</sup> Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking: A History of Dunedin's "Inner Circle"', 60-61.

<sup>16</sup> John and Taylor White of "Mt Nicholas" were the sons of a reverend and grandsons of the first Baronet White. Both held commissions in the Indian Army. The Whites' successor on "Mt Nicholas" was their cousin, John Ambrose Hodge, who was the son of the Vicar of Clareborough; Florence Mackenzie, *Wakatipu Pioneers*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1951), 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Sinclair, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Eldred-Grigg claimed that only two out of his 314 landowners were from the 'lower-class'.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, 64-65.

the Boyes brothers (1866-86), saw their yearly returns and financial position steadily deteriorate to culminate in abandonment or foreclosure.

Jim McAloon has been the most recent to address the issue of colonial wealth. Using a purely monetary yardstick, McAloon has argued that the wealthy of Canterbury and Otago, both commercial and pastoral, were far from an idle rich or 'gentry' (the term in fact being redundant in the colonial context). Rather they were a group who were thoroughly capitalist in outlook, many of whom came from lower middle class origins and who largely subscribed to the Calvinist bourgeois traditions of hard work, thrift, and moderation to not only accumulate their wealth but to maintain and protect it.<sup>20</sup> The suggestion that landowners viewed their holdings in predominantly economic terms, rather than a means to accumulate status and power, reinforces those assertions made by Sinclair. A further important point raised by McAloon, and overlooked by Eldred-Grigg and others, is that a sizeable proportion of the region's 'wealthy' included many small 'family farmers' who became prosperous through mixed farming on the Otago and Canterbury lowlands.

In one sense, McAloon's discussion of pastoral wealth has little relevance to the Wakatipu. Very few of the early Wakatipu runholders became 'wealthy' from their land holdings, and even fewer were able to retain that wealth till their death. W.S. Trotter of "Greenvale" is one who died wealthy, while John Butement's wealth evaporated with the demise of his property interests.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand those backgrounds and personal traits that characterised the wealthy runholders were not limited to that group, but were undoubtedly shared among a wider cross-section of the farming community. Given the available information, therefore, it is possible to make several observations, in line with those of Sinclair and McAloon, as to the class and occupational background of the early runholders of the Wakatipu.

Nineteenth century pastoral settlement in the Wakatipu proceeded in three main waves. Like other regions of Otago and Southland, runholders at all these stages were

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<sup>20</sup> McAloon, *No Idle Rich*, 14, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking – Appendices', Appendix 14, 78; WS Trotter's estate was worth £14,868 in 1893. It is doubtful, however, how much of his wealth was generated by his Wakatipu run, as opposed to his other landowning interests in Otago and Southland.

a heterogeneous group.<sup>22</sup> The first wave occurred from the early 1860s to the mid-1870s when the runs were first selected and stocked. As mentioned earlier, during this phase, extensive pastoralism was limited to around half a dozen stations not directly within the most auriferous regions of the Wakatipu gold field. These runs were large and so were stock numbers.

Although this period saw a prevalence of upper-middle class runholders from Britain, such as William Rees, and the White, Hodge and Boyes brothers, they were on the whole atypical of the region's runholders. Even if these men initially brought large amounts of finance with them, they were probably more reliant on borrowed capital than others have assumed.<sup>23</sup> When their runs failed, there was often no safety net of family wealth for these men to fall back upon. William Rees spent the rest of his days in relative obscurity as a station manager and stock inspector. Charles Crofton Boyes, who was the resident partner in Kawarau Falls, became a town clerk in Queenstown.<sup>24</sup>

The most successful of these early runholders came from more modest backgrounds. John Butement ran, with his brothers, an aerated water business in Dunedin before taking up North Station in 1866 from the dissolved Grant, Gammie Maitland and Rees partnership.<sup>25</sup> William Sinclair Trotter of Greenvale was the son of a Caithness shepherd. He came to Otago in 1840, working as a shepherd on Johnny Jones's farming settlement at Waikouaiti, before acquiring his own properties.<sup>26</sup> The McBride brothers, who came from Ireland in the wake of the Central Otago goldrush, were involved in a partnership, which included a successful sawmilling business near Glenorchy. When the partnership ended Frank McBride acquired a productive freehold farm at Frankton and interests in the Earnslaw, Ben Lomond and

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<sup>22</sup> Campbell, 'Runholding in Otago and Southland 1848-1876', 83-85; Tom Brooking, 'Runholders of Otago and Southland', in *The Cyclopaedia of Otago and Southland Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Sorrel (Dunedin: Dunedin City Council, 1999), 781.

<sup>23</sup> In 1871 the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company (NZLMA) advanced the Boyes brothers £9,000, on security of 80,000 acres and 28,000 sheep. Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking – Appendices' Appendix 10, 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> He died in 1892 leaving only £989, while his brother Frank, who spent much of the time abroad left an estate worth £22,000. Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking – Appendices' Appendix 10, 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 24-27.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Trotter, 'William Sinclair Trotter', in *Southern People*, ed. Jane Thomson (Dunedin: Longacre Press, 1998), 520.



Queenstown Hill runs. His brother Daniel McBride took up Kawarau Falls Station in 1898.<sup>27</sup>

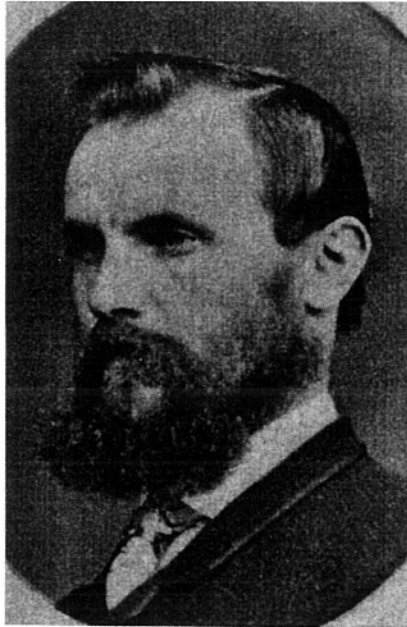
Although one tends to view the 1860s and early 1870s as being dominated by the large flock owners and speculators there are several instances of Scottish families from modest, often farming backgrounds settling in the Wakatipu region and engaging in smaller scale pastoral farming from the 1860s. Some came directly from Scotland, while others had spent short periods in Australia. The Meiklejohn family, from Caithness in the far north of Scotland, occupied the lakeside country between Queenstown and 25-Mile Creek (the southern boundary of North Station) between 1868 and 1922. The Kirkpatrick brothers settled around the same time, working along side and in conjunction with the Meiklejohns for many years on Mt Creighton and the neighbouring Closeburn run. Stuart Duke, the manager of Mt Creighton and later owner of Twenty-Five Mile came from a sheep farming family in Forfarshire, Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

The second phase of occupation began with the sale of runs in 1874 and 1876. To Central Otago businessmen and ex-miners alike, high country farming may have appeared as an attractive proposition by the mid-1870s. The gold rush economy was declining, wool prices were slowly improving, land speculation was being encouraged by the money borrowed and spent by the Vogel Ministry and rabbits, although present, were not yet a serious problem on most properties. Some businessmen who bought runs at the 1870s auctions probably viewed runholding as an ancillary enterprise to their other business ventures. Other purchases were undoubtedly speculations. Bendix Hallenstein, the wealthy Queenstown merchant, bought four runs between Table Bay and the Lochy River at the 1874 auction. His partner in the sale, John Wither, managed the station known as Sunnyside (later Cecil Peak), before acquiring the leasehold titles under his own name in 1896. John McArdell operated as

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<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie, *Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, 46-47; Daniel McBride died in 1914 leaving a substantial estate and bequeathed a Brinsmead piano and four-wheeled phaeton to his daughter, McBride Probate File 3600 (1914) DAFG/9066, Archives New Zealand, Dunedin Branch (ANZ/D).

<sup>28</sup> Miller, 305.



John Trotter Butement, North Station, 1868-1887.

Original: Miss C. Butement  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



**Fig. (1.2)**

Thomas Kirkpatrick, with son Robert, 12-Mile, 1874-1878.

Original: Mrs S.L. Ayton  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

a Queenstown, and Provincial Government, auctioneer before joining John Ambrose Hodge in Mt Nicholas and Eastbourne stations.<sup>29</sup>

The 1870s also saw the entrance of two ubiquitous and lasting family names in Wakatipu runholding - the Bairds and Patersons. Both entered into runholding from a background in family farming. Borthwick Robert Baird had come to Central Otago, via Victoria, following the discovery of gold in 1861. Successful speculation in mining ventures had made him, by local standards, a man of some wealth. By 1884 Baird had acquired a substantial, mixed farming estate near Lake Hayes called "Bendemeer". Although not strictly a runholder himself, as an extensive moneylender in the Wakatipu district, B.R. Baird was a mortgagee for several runs, including Mt Crieghton, Coronet Peak, and Ayrburn.<sup>30</sup> Baird's nephews, on the other hand, were at various times, holders of pastoral leases. Robert Hope Baird was a partner in "Coronet Peak" during the 1890s, before the lease, and "Bendeemer" were passed on to his younger brother Graham Dick Baird in 1900. G.D Baird's own sons would continue to be involved in runholding in the Crown Range and Skippers districts during the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup>

The story of the Paterson family largely mirrored that of the Bairds. After twenty-five years in Victoria, William Paterson came to New Zealand in 1863, settling in Arrowtown. There he traded as a butcher and storekeeper, but also expanded his landholdings as opportunity existed, forming a freehold estate of 1,700 acres, and naming it "Ayrburn". In 1874, and by now describing himself as a farmer, Paterson expanded into runholding, taking the Mt Soho run on the Crown Terrace, and in 1876, the neighbouring Run 25. A further 43,000 acres (Run 334b) was added in 1897. The freehold and three leasehold properties were worked as one under the family farm's name - "Ayrburn". Paterson's property interests also extended southwards to Garston where he held the West Dome Station from 1880-1910.<sup>32</sup> Although the Ayrburn and West Dome stations were run by the Paterson's for over thirty years, their business was frequently met with checks. In 1887 the British and New Zealand Mortgage

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Chandler, 'Promised Land of Rees (II)', unpublished manuscript, Manuscripts and Related Research: Wakatipu Runs Histories and Shotover: A History, (MS-1270-1-5/002), Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



**Fig. (1.3)**

Mr and Mrs William McAllister, 'Halfway Bay'.  
William McAllister, an ex-miner from the Shotover diggings, took up the run in the 1870s.

Original: W.A. McAllister  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

Agency Company exercised its power of sale, and all of Paterson's property passed into the hands of the mortgagee, and Paterson's close neighbour, B.R. Baird.

The involvement of family farmers in runholding, such as the Bairds and Patersons, suggests that there was a degree of fluidity in landowners moving between the two types of farming. Although families who began in mixed farming and branched into runholding continued to be primarily identified with the former. During the twentieth century, further lowland farmers would straddle the two farming realms.

If the occupational background of the nineteenth century Wakatipu runholders was typically heterogeneous, ethnicity was slightly more even. At all stages of runholding in the Wakatipu, Scots were well represented. Most came from humble backgrounds and often had experience in farming. Among the earliest Scottish runholders and those that came later, Highlanders were over-represented. During the 1890s, Highlanders held no fewer than eight runs around the Wakatipu but particularly those on the isolated and rugged western shore. Many more Highlanders worked as shepherds and station managers. On Cainard, at the southern end of the lake, Gaelic was the only language spoken during the station's early days.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, kinship ties were important and can be identified among subsets of nineteenth century Scottish runholders. A distinctive Highland knot, centred in northern Southland, but reaching into the Wakatipu involved, among others, the Cameron, Trotter, Manson, Meiklejohn and McCormick families.

Scots were also predominant in what Peter Chandler identified as a new class of pastoralist entering the Wakatipu from the 1880s – the shepherd turned runholder.<sup>34</sup> These men characterised the third wave of settlement in the Wakatipu. These 'shepherd-runholders' were a more practical group of men than many of those large flock owners and speculators that came before them. Most were Scots, usually possessing limited capital means, but were experienced shepherds in their native country and on the high country of New Zealand. As opposed to those who took up land in the 1860s, who came directly from Scotland or through Australia, generally

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<sup>33</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Chandler, 'Promised Land of Rees (I)', unpublished manuscript, Manuscripts and Related Research: Wakatipu Runs Histories and Shotover: A History, Peter Chandler Research Papers, (MS-1270-1-5/001), Hocken Library.

these men had been in New Zealand for several years, working on various stations in Canterbury and Otago, often attaining the position of head shepherd or manager, before selecting their own property. Pastoral runs in the 1880s were not difficult to find or purchase - economic depression and rabbit infestation had reduced Wakatipu land values and rentals to a minimum.

One Highlander was Andrew Lambie who took up the newly grouped “Mt Aurum” Station in 1901. Lambie was head shepherd on Ben Ohau Station in the Mackenzie country, before moving south in search of his own property. Alexander Elliot managed Mavora Station, before gaining a block of land from the Fernhill run, which became “Elfin Bay”.<sup>35</sup> Another Highlander, Donald McLeod, took up Cainard in 1888 after shepherding for several years on nearby runs.<sup>36</sup> Hugh Mackenzie might also fit in this category. After selling up Coronet Peak in 1878, Hugh spent several years shepherding and farming on the foot of Walter Peak. His purchase of the Walter Peak leasehold in 1882, followed later by the Mt Nicholas and Fernhill runs, was done judiciously, having developed an eye for potentially good wool growing country through his time on the land.

What these new runholders lacked in capital was made up in resourcefulness. Donald McLeod, arrived on Cainard in 1888 with only 300 sheep and made his first home under an overhanging rock. He continued to shepherd and muster away from Cainard until the flock was brought up to an economic level.<sup>37</sup> Alex Elliot of “Elfin Bay” literally built his first homestead out of the bush, splitting and dressing the slabs by hand and using wooden pegs instead of nails.<sup>38</sup> Andrew Lambie ran “Mt Aurum” with minimal buildings or fencing and would carry clover seed in his pockets, to scatter in those places sheep frequented.<sup>39</sup>

## Sheep, Scale of Operations and Run Management

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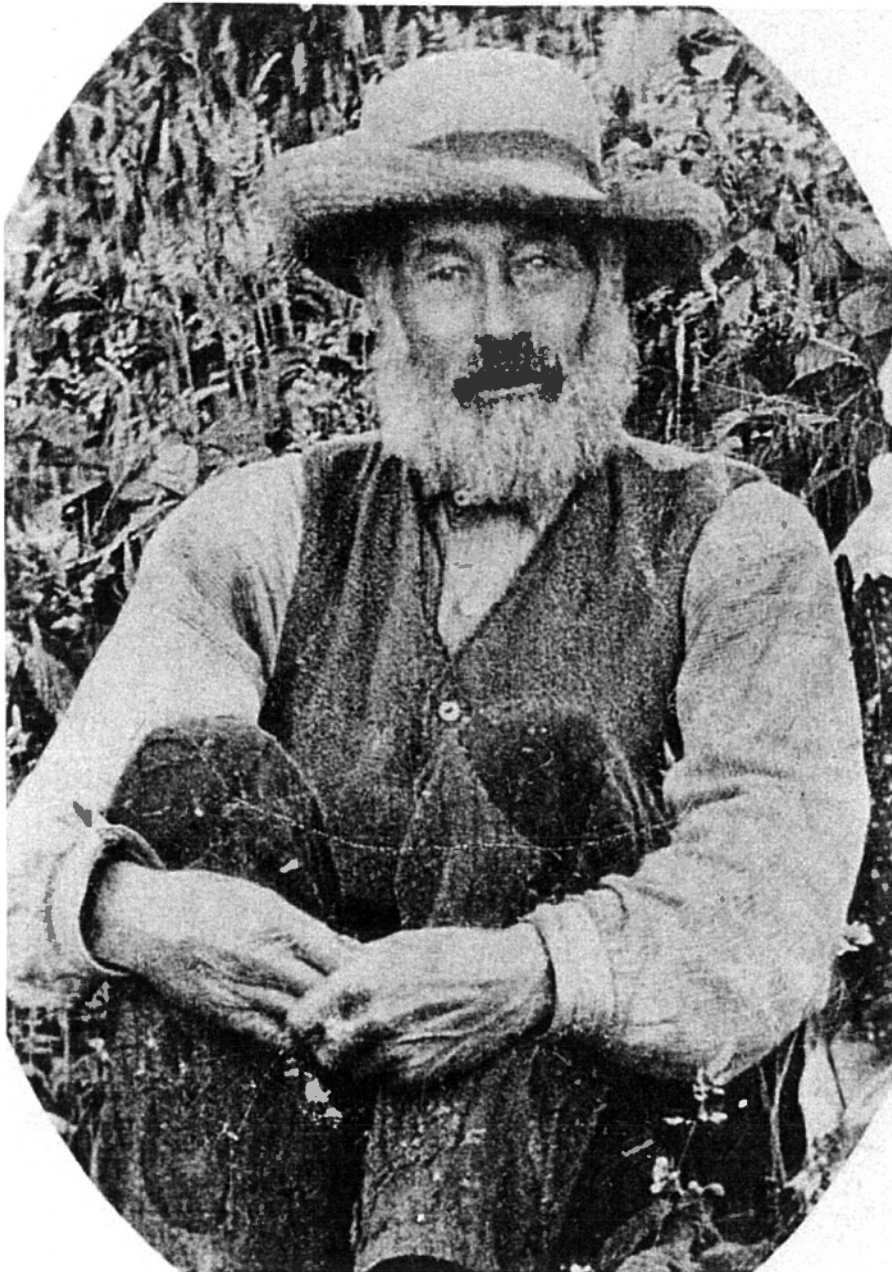
<sup>35</sup> Miller, 302-303.

<sup>36</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. By 1895 McLeod was running over 7,000 sheep on Cainard.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, 303.

<sup>39</sup> Chandler, ‘Promised Land of Rees (I)’, unpublished manuscript.



**Fig. (1.4)**

Alexander Elliot, first owner of Elfin Bay Station

Alexander Elliot came to Elfin Bay in 1895 after managing Mavora Station. He built his first homestead out of the bush, splitting and dressing the slabs by hand and using wooden pegs instead of nails. Elfin Bay remained in the Elliot family until 1918.

Original photo: R.J. Elliot  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library

Once selected, the runs had to be stocked. On all the runs, the Merino sheep predominated. Peter Chandler suggested that the rapid build up of sheep flocks in the Wakatipu district was the result of runholders buying up surplus wethers for 3/- or 4/- per head from the older established stations in Otago and Southland.<sup>40</sup> From 4,000 sheep in 1867, John Butement's flock on "North Station" totalled at least 37,000, and possibly over 40,000 in 1880, before rabbits devastated his winter country. At the station's height, Butement's wool clip would have totalled in the region of 400 bales.<sup>41</sup> On Kawarau Falls, the flock reached a peak of 29,000 in 1877, before the 1878 snow and rabbits reduced it to approximately 6,000.<sup>42</sup> As in other districts, the natural increase in sheep numbers, supplemented by imports from outside of the region and from overseas, led to many runs being overstocked. It also appears that deliberate overstocking was a common practice on many runs, which served to exacerbate stock losses in severe winters. Until a boiling-down plant was established at Frankton in 1880, often the only efficient means of disposing of aged sheep was over a handy cliff. It has also been suggested that the high stocking rates opened up the vegetation, depleted the rabbit's natural enemies, such as the Weka, and allowed the rabbit to thrive.<sup>43</sup> With the importation of stock from Otago, Canterbury and Southland, it was inevitable that sheep scab would reach the lake. In 1864 over half of Grant, Gammie and Rees's sheep were infected, while Nicholas Von Tunzelman's entire flock was diseased.<sup>44</sup>

The evolution of the uniquely New Zealand high country system of free-range sheep grazing is an interesting but often overlooked feature of New Zealand's pastoral history.<sup>45</sup> Space precludes an extensive discussion here, but early practices were an combination of those developed on the plains of Australia; those traditions brought by the shepherds and station managers, mainly from the border regions of the British Isles and the Scottish Highlands; and methods born out of the particular demands of New Zealand's climate and geography. Unsuitable techniques were eventually discarded while others were modified and adapted.

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<sup>40</sup> Chandler, 'Shotover: a history', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>41</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Jardine, 161.

<sup>43</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Robert L. Peden, 'Sheep Farming Practice in Colonial Canterbury 1834 to 1882,' (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2002).



The Australian system of grazing a flock by day and yarding or folding them at night was found to be impractical with large flocks on steep country. Other forms of close herding imported from the hill country of the British Isles were also gradually abandoned.<sup>46</sup> As sheep grazing became more free-range, and where run boundaries were often arbitrary lines on maps, full-time boundary-keepers were employed to keep flocks separate. This was particularly important in the 1860s when mixing flocks risked spreading scab. Again this practice was gradually phased out as boundary fences replaced shepherds, and run boundaries were made to follow natural, impassable features. Where sheep did stray onto adjoining runs, they would be drafted out at shearing and returned to their rightful owner. What did persist longer was the uniquely New Zealand system of boundary keeping in its more limited sense. Where there was no fence or natural boundary between the summer and winter country, it was the job of the boundary-keeper to prevent sheep returning to the higher ground once they had been mustered onto their winter blocks. This job would continue until snow formed a natural barrier between the winter and summer country.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, some Scottish Highland practices fitted well or were adapted to New Zealand's high country. Those Highland runholders who were familiar with the system of snow raking reduced their losses considerably in severe winters. Andrew Lambie of Mt Aurum even continued a modified form of close shepherding (called 'tailing' in John Wither's diaries) into the twentieth century. By knowing the places most favoured by a flock, one could locate sheep much easier when snow blanketed the hills.<sup>48</sup> If some early shepherding practices were traditional others were simply unorthodox. Peter Chandler likened Donald McLeod's flock management as being 'on similar lines to the patriarchal shepherds of the Bible.' Rather than the general muster of most stations, each mob of ewes on Cainard had its own territory from where they were driven for shearing and then returned afterwards. Often small missed mobs of sheep would be left undisturbed with the remark "Let the beasties be."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> On Kawarau Falls, huts built high up in the summer grazing country were used as summer camps for shepherds when the country was first stocked and a type of 'old-country' system of close herding was still practised, Jardine, 102; 119.

<sup>47</sup> See Jardine, Ch. 9 for an excellent description of the boundary-keeper's role.

<sup>48</sup> Chandler, 'Promised Land of Rees (I)', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>49</sup> Wild, inbred sheep would remain a problem of Cainard into the twentieth century; Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 61.

Although the broken and mountainous nature of the Wakatipu country meant little fencing was needed to keep flocks separate, just as many sheep were lost in this type of country as were added to the flock through lambing. In order to manage their station and sheep more effectively, the Mackenzies of Walter Peak were the first to extensively fence their whole property. The first snow-line fence was erected in 1897. Its purpose was to prevent sheep from leaving the sunny faces in spring as the snow lifted and moving into the backcountry before shearing. The fence's effectiveness in reducing losses was apparent almost immediately. Over the next fourteen years the family would construct over 170 miles of boundary and internal fencing, including some 70 miles of mountain fences at altitudes of 4,000-5,000 feet.<sup>50</sup>

The real danger of having flocks caught out in severe snow was made clear in the winter of 1878. This was the first major setback to pastoral expansion in the Wakatipu district. Snow fell on 12 May and, with only brief respite, continued into September. Heavy sheep losses were reported right across Otago and Southland. In the Wakatipu region, the Goldfield Warden's annual report estimated a cash loss of £20,000; out of 140,000 sheep on 31 runs, about 45,000, or a third of the entire flock were lost. Deliberate overstocking on some runs probably amplified losses, as did inexperience among runholders. Those who began snow raking almost immediately were able to save many sheep while those who waited for the thaw (which did not come for weeks) were devastated.<sup>51</sup>

To rebuild a station's sheep numbers after heavy snow could take up to five years and use up several years' profits. The most severe winters could financially ruin properties. What the 1878 snow served to illustrate was the inexperience of some runholders and the lack of safe winter country on several runs. Further bad winters were experienced in 1887 and 1888. It appears, however, that the Wakatipu escaped the worst of the 1895 snowfalls that devastated sheep flocks in Canterbury and the Mackenzie country. In 1896 the Mackenzies of Walter Peak were able to sell over 4,000 Merino ewes to the Prestons of Haldon Station in the Mackenzie Country.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Mackenzie, *Memories of Walter Peak, Mt Nicholas and Fernhill Stations*, 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Julian Kuzma, 'The 1895 Snowstorm', (BA (Hons) diss., University of Otago, 1999), 57.

Several Wakatipu runholders, however, did make use of the Pastoral Tenants Relief Act, passed in 1896, to compensate runholders for their losses, either to gain a fresh lease or an extension to their existing term.

For many men, the 1878 snow was the fatal blow in a mounting struggle against rabbit infestation, impossible rental obligations and a steady decline in wool prices. Abandonment and foreclosure were the inevitable results. In 1879 alone, twenty Wakatipu runs were surrendered. By 1881, and apart from Mt Creighton and Sunnyside, all of the runs in the Wakatipu Depasturing District had been abandoned. In total no less than sixty runs, from Lake Wakatipu to Lake Wanaka, were surrendered, re-let and often surrendered again between 1877 and 1884.<sup>53</sup> In several instances lessees would surrender their run in order to obtain a new lease at a reduced rental. As the practice became more widespread, however, many runholders were met with a point blank refusal from the Land Board. John Butement was one runholder who had to wait for the full term of his leases to expire before being able to renew them at much lower rentals.

As mortgagee for many of the Wakatipu runholders, the N.Z.L.M.A. faced a wave of defaults as runs were thrown up. Possession was often secured through abandonment, while at the same time the company was not hesitant to institute foreclosure on others. In some cases the Loan Company had little choice but to act. John Ambrose Hodge and his partner John McArdell, had received heavy advances from the N.Z.L.M.A. on their "Mt Nicholas" property. The Loan Company was obliged to take possession in 1879, after McArdell and Hodge had mortgaged 30,000 sheep but only mustered 5,599 following the 1878 snow.<sup>54</sup> By 1880, along with Mt Nicholas, the Loan Company was in possession of the Fernhill and Birchdale runs on the western shores of the lake, the Eastbourne run behind Arrowtown and the Birchgrove run at Halfway Bay.<sup>55</sup> Between 1886 and 1898, the Loan Company held Kawarau Falls,<sup>56</sup> while in 1887 possession was taken of John Butement's extensive holdings at the head of the lake.<sup>57</sup> Provided they were not surrendered to the Crown, the Loan Company's

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<sup>53</sup> 'Runs Abandoned in Otago During the Years 1877-84', *AJHR*, C-9, 1885, 1-3.

<sup>54</sup> Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking – Appendices', Appendix 10, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Jardine, 161.

<sup>57</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 13.



Firewood Creek, Cainard Station.  
In this valley was Donald McLeod's first 'homestead' under an overhanging rock.

Peter Chandlers Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



Fig. (1.5)

A Hut on John Howell's 'Long Burn' Run, c. 1874-75 – presumably near the mouth of the  
Short Burn at Halfway Bay.

Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-2/003, Hocken Library

practice on these runs was to employ managers to try and rehabilitate the properties for sale.<sup>58</sup>

Although the two largest flock owners, John Butement and the Boyes brothers, survived the winter of 1878, the snow served to exacerbate existing problems. The Boyes had built up their Kawarau Falls flock to 29,000 by 1877. But snow and rabbits combined to increase the brothers' indebtedness.<sup>59</sup> When the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company took possession of Kawarau Falls in 1887, the brothers' indebtedness totalled £29,272.<sup>60</sup> In John Butement's case, the deterioration of his position occurred remarkably quickly. Even in 1885, when problems were starting to mount on North Station, the Loan Company manager described John Butement as "a wealthy undoubted man".<sup>61</sup> By 1888 his freehold land was transferred to the New Zealand Loan Company to settle a debt of £6,583, and all of his leaseholds were surrendered.

What the problems of the late 1870s and 1880s highlighted for both the Crown and runholders was that many pastoral leases in the Wakatipu were unbalanced and unviable. Without sufficient 'safe' winter country, stock losses such as those experienced in 1878 would be repeated. Over the next fifteen years the majority of the Wakatipu runs had their survey boundaries and acreages fairly well defined. Generally these boundaries would not alter a great deal over the next seventy years, even during the extensive subdivision of crown pastoral lands in the first decades of the twentieth century. What had yet to be settled, however, was which runs needed to be grouped or regrouped together to form larger holdings, and which runs were capable, in terms of size (carrying capacity) and topography (containing sufficient summer and winter country), of being worked on their own account as viable economic units.

The Skippers runs underwent several reshufflings before aggregating into four main holdings – The Branches, Mt Aurum, Coronet Peak and Ben Lomond. In these cases

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Captain G.H.T Boyes, a career naval officer and absentee partner, claimed that he had received only £2,700 from the property in nineteen years.

<sup>60</sup> Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking - Appendices', Appendix 10, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Sinclair, 'High Street Quaking', 375.

the Crown provided direction. Since 1874, the Shotover runs had been successively leased and abandoned due to a combination of unrealistic rentals, rabbit infestation, low wool prices and heavy snow losses. In an effort to keep the country tenanted, the Crown re-grouped runs and adjusted rentals. The Branches, the largest station at 98,600 acres, was first combined in 1883 when the Crown grouped together and auctioned the five upper Shotover runs (Nos. 16, 17, 20, 21, and 22).<sup>62</sup> Also combined in the Government auction of February 1883, were the several runs that would form Coronet Peak station, and the four runs (Nos. 11, 12, 13, 15) bordering the west of the Shotover River and Skippers Creek. This latter group, however, was surrendered and re-let separately - runs 13 and 15 joining with run 16 to form Mt Aurum Station, run 12 becoming part of Ben Lomond and run 11 part of Twenty-Five Mile.

Other stations were built up by runholders as time and circumstances allowed. Local experience, which earlier runholders lacked, was invaluable in determining suitable balances of grazing country. Stuart Duke, manager of Mt Creighton, and living in the Wakatipu since 1873, formed Twenty-Five Mile station when he took up run 346a in 1889, adding run 11 in 1903 and run 12a in 1909. Although the two runs were worked together, "Twenty-Five Mile" was formally absorbed into "Mt Creighton" (Nos. 9 and 9a) in 1922. David McKinlay secured the rugged Mt Gilbert run (No. 12) at auction in 1888. When the Ben Lomond run (No. 10) was forfeit in 1902, McKinlay added it to Mt Gilbert; thus gaining some extra all-important winter country and easier access. The Mackenzies of Walter Peak station gradually built up their own pastoral empire on the western shores of the lake, combining eight runs, over 168,000 acres, between 1882 and 1905. Once runs became grouped they generally remained so through changes of ownership. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, nearly all of the stations had become established entities in themselves, either as a single run or an amalgamation of two or more. Over the course of the century, as owners came and went, they would remain largely unchanged, in both dimension and name.

Along with the various groupings and re-groupings of runs, many had become so unattractive and the land market so depressed during the 1880s, that in all cases

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<sup>62</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, January 31 1883, 167. Although the lease was surrendered again in 1886, and run 16 was detached, subsequent leaseholders of this station continued to work the remaining four large, isolated, and mountainous blocks together.

rentals were greatly reduced, some to a nominal amount. The combined rental of The Branches, over 98,000 acres, was reduced to a paltry £5 per annum by 1889.<sup>63</sup> On the 26,400 acre Birchdale run, situated to the north of the Greenstone River, Hector Fraser secured a 21-year lease from 1888 also for £5 per annum. The rental of Rees Valley was whittled down to £27 by 1896, a far cry from the £595 per annum offered by John Butement when he won the property at auction 1874. Such instances of peppercorn rentals coupled with comparatively long leases were commonplace around the Wakatipu district from the 1880s till the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact one of the greatest sources of contention between leaseholders and the Crown during the first half of the twentieth century was (as the runholders saw it) the exorbitant and unjust increases in rent.

### **Wakatipu Runholding and the Environment**

Information regarding the impacts of the nineteenth century Wakatipu runholders on the natural environment is sparse and uneven. One can safely assume, however, that there was a great deal of environmental learning and costly trial and error carried out before generally accepted methods of grazing, burning, sowing, and stock management were established.

The firestick wielding runholder is an enduring image of nineteenth century pastoralism. Whether this characterisation is entirely warranted or not, repeated indiscriminate burning of the South Island's high country tussock lands, particularly on sunny faces in the height of summer, left the ground barren, making it prone to erosion and the spread of noxious weeds. Given the available information, it is difficult to assess the burning practices of the nineteenth century Wakatipu runholders. When the runs were first stocked, fire was most certainly a useful tool in clearing the dense bracken and scrub that cloaked the lakefront right up to the bush line. Inevitably the torch was then turned onto the tussock lands as sheep quickly creamed off the most palatable native grasses. According to Florence Mackenzie, the injudicious use of fire to stimulate the growth of palatable new tussock shoots 'helped

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<sup>63</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 93.

to ruin the country' in conjunction with rabbits and over grazing.<sup>64</sup> Based on research by Robert Peden, it is safe to assume however that by the end of the nineteenth century more discretion was exercised in burning tussock land.<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, by the end of the nineteenth century the use of fire to clear unproductive bracken and fern land was probably only used in proportion to the capacity of the runholder, after the burn, to surface sow the ground in exotic pasture. Landowners quickly discovered that burnt fern country, left untouched after firing, rapidly regenerated within twelve months.<sup>66</sup> Grass seed took well if the landowner chose to surface sow, and sheep would keep down the young re-emerging fern shoots. Yet under the conditions of their leases, there was very little encouragement or incentive for runholders to establish permanent pastures. Extensive surface sowing involved a heavy outlay in capital and labour, and runholders were not compensated for improvements such as pasture creation at the end of their short leases. The relatively useless fern country, therefore, being futile to repeatedly burn but too expensive to convert into pasture, remained a continual source of frustration to runholders into the twentieth century.

Those with suitable areas of freehold, however, were better placed to lay down permanent pasture. The carrying capacity of any high country run was in direct proportion to the number of sheep that could be successfully wintered. In the Wakatipu winter country was especially scarce, and bringing all potential winter country into production in either grass or winter fodder crops was an essential but costly task. On Walter Peak, the cost of breaking down the fern, ploughing the land and sowing grass was between £5-£7 per acre.<sup>67</sup> Most of the early surface sowing was done by hand.<sup>68</sup> By 1905, the Meiklejohns of Mt Creighton, the Mackenzies, and James Milne of Fernhill had established areas of exotic grasses.

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<sup>64</sup> Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, 132.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Peden, "The Exceeding Joy of Burning"- Pastoralists and the Lucifer Match: Burning the Rangelands of the South Island of New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century, 1850 to 1890', *Agricultural History*, 80, 1, (2006), 17-34.

<sup>66</sup> Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, 299.

<sup>68</sup> Mackenzie, *Memories of Walter Peak, Mt Nicholas and Fernhill Stations*, 17-18.



The spread of noxious weeds had also become a problem by the late nineteenth century. A desire to recreate what was familiar and comforting in unfamiliar surroundings, led many settlers, both in the low and high country, to introduce exotic trees, shrubs, plants and grasses. Station homesteads, such as Kawarau Falls, and their English gardens became focal points of the community. A few of these introduced species, however, adapted too readily to New Zealand conditions and soon became troublesome weeds. St John's Wort, introduced by gold miners, became a problem, particularly towards Mt Aurum.<sup>69</sup> The expense and scarcity of wire meant many early fences were made of gorse, sweetbriar and hawthorn. Nicholas von Tunzelman, a man of eccentric tastes, deliberately planted blackberry and sweet briar along the lakeside at Fernhill. Later the Mackenzies would spend hundreds of pounds in an attempt eradicate the plants which had spread across their property.<sup>70</sup> William Rees had liberated rabbits for sport near Queenstown in 1866, but these most probably did not survive. The main rabbit incursion into the Wakatipu in the 1870s came from the south and east through Central Otago.<sup>71</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the impact rabbits had on the Wakatipu runs and on Central Otago in general. Up till 1887, over 1.3 million acres in Otago had been surrendered owing to rabbits. While most of the country had been re-tenanted, over 400,000 acres remained abandoned to the rabbit.<sup>72</sup> The most serious effect of the rabbit plague was a dramatic and permanent reduction in carrying capacity on nearly every run. The Wakatipu Gold Field Warden reported in 1878 that one property's carrying capacity had been reduced by 10,000 through rabbits.<sup>73</sup> Countywide the reductions were quite spectacular. In 1880 Lake County contained 250,150 sheep, but only 159,603 twenty years later.<sup>74</sup> It must be noted, however, that even without rabbits the high stocking rates could not have been maintained as continuous grazing and repeated burning depleted the indigenous tussock lands.

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<sup>69</sup> Chandler, 'Promised Land of Rees (I)', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, 294.

<sup>71</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> 'Lands Thrown-Up in Rabbit Infested Districts in Otago and Southland', *AJHR*, C-17, 1887.

<sup>73</sup> 'Report of the Wakatipu Warden', *The Gold Fields of New Zealand: Report on, AJHR, H-4*, 1878, 21.

<sup>74</sup> Annual Sheep Returns, *AJHR, H-19*, 1883; *H-23*, 1900, 113.

Various methods of poisoning, trapping and fumigating rabbits were experimented with, while the liberation of natural predators including ferrets, stoats, weasels and cats was just as harmful to native bird life as the rabbits. In one month in 1881, only two years after their presence first being noticed, 10,000 rabbits were poisoned on Queenstown Hill and the Commonage, and an estimated 20,000 on five lower Shotover farms.<sup>75</sup> On Mt Nicholas, considered the biggest rabbit warren in the Wakatipu, the Mackenzie's had, in one year, 105,000 baled rabbit skins in their shed. Even this amount was considered to be only half the rabbits on the property.<sup>76</sup>

Runholders were involved in early, but ineffective, local-body attempts to control the pest. John Butement, William Paterson and Charles Crofton Boyes, were members of an elected rabbit board set up in 1880.<sup>77</sup> Numerous other local and regional bodies, central government legislation, select committee hearings and Royal Commissions would fail to effectively deal with rabbits in a concerted manner. For runholders, taking up a lease from the early 1880s onwards meant assuming responsibility for rabbit control. Low wool prices throughout the "Hungry Eighties" made large-scale extermination campaigns almost impossible. From the 1880s onwards, therefore, rabbit control became an annual cost of production in wool growing for most Central Otago runholders.

Rabbits were not the only creatures to cause problems for runholders. Wild dogs abandoned by Southland whalers were a problem for many years, particularly on the western stations, and killed hundreds of sheep.<sup>78</sup> There was also a growing body of evidence on the destruction wrought by the native kea on sheep flocks. So-called 'killer' birds would tear at a sheep's back, ripping off wool and flesh to expose the kidneys. Most sheep that suffered such an attack died a slow death from blood poisoning. In 1883 a pound for pound subsidy of up to two hundred pounds was offered by Central government to assist in the destruction of the killer birds.<sup>79</sup> Kea attacks and the limited range of measures available to deal with the birds would remain a problem for runholders throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>75</sup> Chandler, 'Shotover: a history', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, 299.

<sup>77</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipu*, 138.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



**Fig. (1.6)**

Eyre Mountains and Afton Burn: Part of the rugged Mt Nicholas block of Walter Peak Station. Eyre Mountains (left) looking through to McKellar's Flat in the distance. Von River at centre and slopes of Mt Turnbull on extreme right.

Photo: D.L. Homer  
Original: Ian Turnbull  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library

## Conclusion

As a high country region, the Wakatipu experienced many of the vicissitudes of nineteenth century pastoralism. Looking at it very generally it was a microcosm of the typical South Island pattern – with the initial rush for runs in the 1860s, the speculation and relative prosperity of the 1870s and the economic and environmental problems of the 1880s and 1890s. High country settlement followed a similar pattern. As the gold rush declined in the 1870s, Central Otago businessmen and several successful farming families became heavily involved in high country farming. The wave of abandonments in the late 1870s and early 1880s and reduction of land values and rentals to a minimum, then opened the way for men with less capital but greater farming experience to occupy the runs. These runholders would carry the runs through into the twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth century, the backgrounds of runholders were varied while Scots dominated ethnicity.

The generally mountainous environment of the Wakatipu provided particular challenges, perhaps similar to those runs on the flanks of the Southern Alps in Canterbury. Many areas of the Wakatipu had a greater than usual snow risk and winter country was in shorter supply. Accordingly stock mortality was higher and lambing percentages lower. With the flock's natural increase barely covering the death rate, most properties were strictly and solely wool growing propositions. During the 1880s pastoral leases were shuffled and regrouped in an attempt to create economically viable holdings. The 1880s and 1890s also saw the arrival of more 'shepherd-runholders', and the need to cope with the environmental and economic problems that were beginning to plague the pastoral lands. The deterioration of tussock lands, erosion, the spread of noxious weeds and rabbits were problems that would carry over into the first half of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **‘These Runs are all Mountains’: 1900-1920**

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Rural New Zealand at the turn of the century was in a state of evolution. The twenty years prior had seen several important changes in New Zealand’s rural occupation and land use. Since its advent in 1882, refrigeration remained underdeveloped but had opened up new avenues of mixed farming and a seemingly unlimited export market to Britain; in the North Island, the struggle to carve farms out of the bush and establish permanent pasture for dairying was at last providing a livelihood beyond subsistence level; the expansion of the railway network brought the more remote farms in closer contact with markets and freezing works; and the private subdivision of estates, which had proceeded piecemeal from the last quarter of the nineteenth century was given direction and impetus through the closer settlement policies of the Liberal Government. All of these developments however were most keenly felt on the downlands and lower hill country of New Zealand, encompassing the best lamb and mutton, cheese and butter growing regions. Between 1886 and 1906, the number of occupied rural holdings less than 640 acres increased by 29,000 and the area they covered rose from 3.6 to 7.5 million acres. More importantly, in 1906 small farms occupied twice as much of the better quality land as they did in 1886.<sup>1</sup> The high country farmer on the other hand appeared to be regressing. Although the country emerged from economic depression in the mid 1890s, wool prices remained depressed, reaching a new low in 1902.<sup>2</sup> Total sheep numbers in the South Island declined by 1.3 million between 1886 and 1903. A fair proportion of the decrease was from the high country runs, as tussock land deterioration reduced carrying capacities, and snowstorms in 1895 and 1903 decimated flock numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> J.S. Duncan, ‘The Land for the People: Land Settlement and Rural Population Movements, 1886-1906’, in Murray McCaskill (ed.), *Land and Livelihood: Geographical Essays in Honour of George Jobberns*, (Christchurch: New Zealand Geographical Society, 1962), 170, 190.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Cater and John MacGibbon, *Wool: A History of New Zealand’s Wool Industry*, (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2003), 34.

The runholder and Crown pastoral licenses were also on the periphery of the great land debate that dominated late nineteenth century New Zealand society. This fierce and passionate debate primarily centred on the most effective means of closer settlement of land by family farmers. It not only encompassed the political, economic, and social spheres of New Zealand society but it often took on emotional and symbolic dimensions.<sup>3</sup> Once again, however, the land question was primarily a downland affair. Public and political agitation was initially directed at the large freehold mixed-farming estates on the east coast plains, mainly owned by companies and absentees, and to a lesser extent large family estates. Less attention was paid to the specialist wool-growing runs, particularly those in the more marginal regions of the South Island, such as the Lakes District.

During this period of major revision and addition to New Zealand's land tenure, the conditions under which the runholders operated were largely pushed to one side. The terms of pastoral leases in 1900 had advanced little from those of 1877, probably because the system, despite some objections, had worked fairly well. The 1882 Land Act Amendment terminated the right to pre-emption but in its place provided compensation for improvements not exceeding three times the average annual rental. Since 1877, allowance for compensation had only applied to Otago runs. This measure went some way to offsetting one of the greatest disadvantages of the auction system. The 1882 amendment also extended the maximum term of a pastoral license from ten to twenty-one years and the lessee acquired the right to select 150 acres as a homestead-site that was exempt from resumption. The new tenure for small-grazing runs was introduced in 1885 for areas not exceeding 5,000 acres and had proved a popular success. An important distinction was made in the 1888 Land Amendment Act, whereby pastoral runs were divided into those used exclusively for grazing and those appropriate for a mixture of grazing and agriculture but also suitable for subdivision in areas of not more than 5,000 acres. The Crown could resume agricultural-pastoral runs at twelve months notice, while purely pastoral runs could only be resumed at the expiry of the lease or by consent of lessee.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this amendment for the high country runholders, almost entirely on exclusively

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<sup>3</sup> See Tom Brooking, *Lands for the People? The Highland Clearances and the Colonisation of New Zealand: A Biography of John McKenzie*, (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1996), Chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> Out of the 4,499,629 acres held under pastoral lease in Otago in 1905, only 297,287 acres or 6.6% of the total area was resumable. The resumable area was even less in Canterbury. *AJHR*, C-1, 1906, 6.

pastoral runs, was to effectively ameliorate the threat of resumption as a major source of tenure insecurity. The 1892 Land Act changed little. For rentals under £50 per annum, valuation for improvements was extended to five times the average annual rent but remained unchanged for rentals over £50. Rabbit proof fencing was also included in valuations as a separate improvement.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the 1895 Pastoral Tenants Relief Act and the generous assistance it provided, not only improved relations between runholders and the Government, but the devastation of the 1895 winter generated a degree of public sympathy for the high country farmers' plight.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these alterations to pastoral tenure many shortcomings remained: there was still no right of renewal; the auction system was considered detrimental to good husbandry; leases were in some cases too short to offer security; runholders could not cultivate leasehold land for winter feed; and compensation for improvements was inadequate in both coverage and value. The appointment of a Royal Commission in 1905 to consider the various classes of land under Crown tenure provided an opportunity for runholders to express these deficiencies.

### **The 1905 Crown Lands Commission and Pastoral Tenure**

As a record of New Zealand's colonial land tenure and occupation, the 1905 Crown Lands Commission, with first hand testimony from nearly 1,000 landholders, is exceptionally useful to the historian. The Commission not only covered every region of New Zealand (except Westland) and every class of Crown land tenure, but it came amid the country's most drastic period of legislative land reform and dispossession carried out under the Liberal Government.

For runholders, two perennial issues dominated their concerns at the Commission's hearings: obtaining security of tenure and full valuation for their improvements.<sup>7</sup> These deficiencies of the pastoral tenure system were succinctly summarised in a

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<sup>5</sup> As difficult as it is to use, the best source for a guide to early land tenure and legislation in New Zealand is still W.R. Jourdain, *Land Legislation and Settlement in New Zealand*, (Wellington: Department of Lands and Survey, 1925).

<sup>6</sup> Brooking, *Lands for the People?*, 257.

<sup>7</sup> The latter concern was essentially a component of the former, but its importance to runholders was such that it was continuously expressed as a problem in its own right.

petition by pastoral tenants presented to the Land Commission in Timaru in April 1905.<sup>8</sup> Runholders argued that ‘the present tenure under which the pastoral runs are held is detrimental to the interests of the licensee and of the colony.’ In particular the auction system was identified as giving no encouragement to the improvement of runs. Establishing permanent pasture only encouraged competition at auction, and as grassing was not included in compensation, the runholder was then, in order to protect his outlay, most likely forced to regain his run at a grossly inflated rental. The auction system also encouraged overstocking as leases neared expiry, which in turn deteriorated native pastures, reduced the high country’s carrying capacity and ultimately decreased pastoral rentals to the Crown.

To improve the pastoral tenure, the petitioners made several recommendations: that existing tenants whose licenses did not expire by 1 January 1906 be given the option to renew them for fourteen or twenty-one years at an arbitrated rent; that new licenses should contain a sum to be spent on improvements during the term of the lease; runholders who did not renew their lease or have their run acquired for closer settlement, be paid three-fourths of the value of the improvements referred to in the lease; that the term ‘improvements’ be broadened to include roads, tracks, snow-shelters and the sowing of certain grasses; and that all improvements be carefully accounted for by the runholder and Land Board.<sup>9</sup>

Although few gave evidence to the Commission, much of what was contained in the high country petition was echoed by Wakatipu runholders. The majority of pastoral licenses in the Wakatipu were held under fourteen year terms, although within the Southland Land District, it had become standard by the early part of the twentieth century to grant twenty-one year terms on the higher and more marginal runs.<sup>10</sup> Those who gave evidence, particularly runholders within the Otago Land District, spoke in favour of longer leases, mainly in order to obtain full benefit of their improvements effected. Twenty-one years was a unanimously agreed *minimum* leasehold term among witnesses.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Petition of Pastoral Tenants’, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 1594.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John Hay evidence, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 17.

<sup>11</sup> James Milne, 141; Andrew Fraser, 148; George McKenzie, 151; Francis McBride, 152; *AJHR*, C-4, 1905.



In regards to valuation for improvements, legislation in 1882 and 1892 had attempted to remove one of the greatest drawbacks of the auction system by allowing for compensation (for fences and buildings) to three or five times the amount of the average rent. Yet, as John Hay the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland pointed out, the current valuations based on rentals, in many cases, did not cover the value of the fencing alone, much less any buildings erected. Hay suggested that provision be made for the 'fair valuation of all improvements on any pastoral run necessary for the adequate working thereof'.<sup>12</sup> Runholders agreed with the Commissioner. Francis McBride, paying £10 per annum for the Queenstown Hill run, said the current allowance for improvements on his leasehold 'would not pay for the fencing'.<sup>13</sup>

Compensation for surface sowing, however, was the issue on which runholders were most desirous for change. Over the nineteenth century, areas of pasture had been sown on the high country, but generally more in the form of experimentation rather than any systematic grassing programme.<sup>14</sup> Along the Wakatipu lakeshore, the almost impenetrable fern land was regarded as being ideal for conversion into pasture. Yet as Hector Fraser of Birchdale Station discovered in 1906, when he desired to sow around 1,000 acres of fern land with grass and clover, there were no provisions to allow for the valuation of grassing.<sup>15</sup> Andrew Fraser of Mt Alfred, a small run between the Rees and Dart Rivers, pointed out to the Commission that converting fern land into pasture would increase the carrying capacity of his run, generate surplus stock for sale, thus providing an additional source of income to wool, and would prevent the depreciation in the value of his wool that occurs when sheep moved through the dense fern and scrub.<sup>16</sup>

In a practical illustration, John Wither of Sunnyside Station (later Cecil Peak) clearly expressed runholders' concerns over their insecure tenure. Wither, in partnership with

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Francis McBride, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 152.

<sup>14</sup> James Milne of the Fernhill run had successfully sown around 2,000 acres of cocksfoot and white clover, which had helped to maintain, and of recent years, slightly increase his flock. James Milne, 141.

<sup>15</sup> Hector Fraser to Commissioner of Crown Lands (hereafter CCL), Otago, 13 March 1906; PR 1882 Vol. 1, Birchdale, 1896-1945; Land Information New Zealand (hereafter LINZ), Christchurch (ChCh).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Fraser, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 149.

Bendix Hallenstein, had taken possession of Sunnyside in the early 1870s. He had endured the devastating 1878 and 1895 snowfalls, rabbit infestation and economic depression, but now as his lease neared expiry he feared losing his run or having the rental run-up when the property was just beginning to make a consistent return on the capital invested. In 1896, Wither had been granted a five-year extension of his lease under the 1895 Pastoral Tenant Relief Act. Then in 1900, with his lease nearing expiry, Wither applied to the Southland Land Board for a further ten-year extension to 1910.<sup>17</sup>

Wither argued that it was only through having an area of freehold (800 acres) and expending a considerable amount of capital on improvements over many years, such as grassing, boundary fencing, and the building of huts, yards and tracks, that Sunnyside had eventually been made to pay.<sup>18</sup> Without the freehold and improvements, Wither claimed, the run would not only keep very few sheep but ‘would have been abandoned by us long since’.<sup>19</sup> Sunnyside, along with the Meiklejohns Mt Creighton property, was also the only lakeside run that had not cost the Government ‘a great deal of money rabbiting’ through abandonment.<sup>20</sup> Despite Wither’s pleading however, the Land Boards (as many runholders discovered) did not have the authority to accede to such requests. Wither, like others, had to face his run being publicly re-auctioned and compete to win it back.<sup>21</sup>

The Land Commission’s report was submitted in September 1905 and was generally sympathetic to runholders’ concerns.<sup>22</sup> The most forceful changes advocated by the Commission were to give runholders, ‘absolute security of tenure on lease for a term of at least twenty-one years, with valuation for improvements at the end of the term, and right of renewal at an arbitrated rent’.<sup>23</sup> Other suggestions were recitals of various

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<sup>17</sup> John Wither to CCL, Southland, 10 December 1900; 540/11; DAAI/18837/D85/159f, PRL 387, Cecil Peak Station 1895-1947; Archives New Zealand, Dunedin (hereafter ANZ/D).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

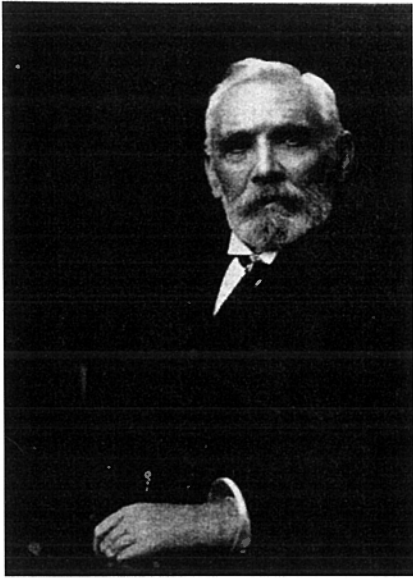
<sup>19</sup> Wither to CCL, Southland, February 1904; 540/19; Wither to CCL, Southland, 27 November 1903; 540/14; PRL 387 Cecil Peak.

<sup>20</sup> Wither to CCL, Southland, 10 December 1900; 540/11; PRL 387 Cecil Peak.

<sup>21</sup> Wither won back the license of Sunnyside in 1905 but sold the following year.

<sup>22</sup> On the various classes of Crown tenure in New Zealand two reports were created but in regards to pastoral tenure, there was little difference between the two.

<sup>23</sup> Oddly, when the Commissioners cited the power of resumption as being a main source of insecurity, they overlooked the fact that, since 1888, this provision only applied to pastoral-agricultural lands not Class I high country runs. Among Wakatipu runholders, all on exclusively pastoral runs, the threat of



John and Marion Wither, Sunnyside, 1874-1906.

Original: J.A. Wither  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



Fig. (2.1)

Hugh Mackenzie Senior and Family, Walter Peak Station, c. 1910.  
Standing, left to right: Walter, 'Stasia, John and wife Beatrice, Alex, Beatrice Craig,  
Margaret. Sitting, left to right: Peter and wife Madge, Flora and husband Hugh Mackenzie,  
Mrs Matthews and Hugh (Ted)

Original: Mrs James Cockburn  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1-/004, Hocken Library

proposals put to the Commissioners during their hearings. These included enforced subdivision and fixed stocking rates to encourage the spelling of country; to provide seed and surface sow 'new grasses'; and to irrigate and allow for the cultivation of winter feed on the leasehold.<sup>24</sup>

Yet following this report, alterations to pastoral tenure legislation were made piecemeal and the administration of the high country continued to exhibit little consistency or purpose of direction. The Land Laws Amendment Act of 1907 removed the limits on compensation, included the sowing of grass as an improvement and permitted the cultivation of winter feed. This last alteration was welcomed by runholders, particularly on runs where little or no freehold land was available. Several took immediate advantage of this new provision.<sup>25</sup> For those with greatly increased rentals it was an imperative. In 1913, Alexander McCaughan of Greenvale, now paying £464 per annum for 23,000 acres, desired to cultivate 700 acres for winter feed in order to make his station more profitable and allow him to maintain his flock. Even the Southland Commissioner of Crown Lands pointed out to his superiors in Wellington that growing winter feed on Greenvale was essential, acknowledging that 'if this were not done, the lessee could not possibly pay his present rent'.<sup>26</sup>

Despite recommendations in 1905, it was not until 1913 that the Land Laws Amendment Act gave the pastoral lessee the right of renewal if the run was to be re-let under the same tenure. If the run was subdivided, the current lessee could select one of the subdivisions at the upset rent. This change effectively ended the pastoral auction system and alleviated yet another unsatisfactory aspect of the pastoral license tenure. The irony, however, was that this amendment was introduced after the majority of the Wakatipu pastoral leases had been re-auctioned.

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termination, mid-lease, was not an issue; '1905 Crown Lands: Report of the Royal Commission on Land Tenure, Land Settlement, and other matters Affecting the Crown Lands of the Colony', *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, xxiv-xxv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Ken McLeod to CCL, Southland, 23 November 1914; DABW/18837/D86/95d, PRL 316, Lorne Peak 1911-1927, ANZ/D.

<sup>26</sup> CCL, Southland to Undersecretary of Lands, 11 July 1913, 315/14; DABW/18837/D86/101a, PRL 412, Greenvale 1911-1933, ANZ/D.

On the other hand, despite the arguments that the lack of a right of renewal contributed to runholder insecurity, the auction system between 1900 and 1913 does not appear to have adversely impacted on many runholders. Rather than losing the run at auction, the greater fear was probably having the rental 'run up'. This rarely occurred however in the Wakatipu. In the most extreme case, Alex McCaughan won back the lease of Greenvale in 1911, for £464 per annum when the upset price was £175. The newly subdivided runs at the southeastern end of the lake also fetched prices considerably above upset. But, in general, as the Wakatipu runs were re-auctioned between 1900 and 1913, nearly all of the current runholders got their runs back at auction, at or slightly above the upset price. In fact between 1900 and 1920, only four runs within the Wakatipu changed hands by way of the auction system. The auctions did see some upset prices set above existing rents, but not to onerous levels, and were generally in line with improving markets.<sup>27</sup> The rentals of several other runs remained steady and some even fell slightly. The irony, as will be seen below, was that most dissatisfaction with pastoral rentals came not from increases through the auction system but those set by the Land Boards under the provisional license renewal system from 1913.

Under the new provisional renewal system established in 1913, a report was compiled on a run a year before its lease expired, it would then be classified according to its best use and suitability for subdivision and finally a new lease and rental offered to the tenant. Crown Rangers generally gave a fair and accurate evaluation of the limitations of the pastoral runs but their 'market' rental assessments were often considered unrealistic. It is not always clear how rental values were assessed. Some were based on the run's unimproved value, and others on the run's rated carrying capacity and production potential. If one looks at rentals based on carrying capacity, there was considerable disparity in rentals among runs. Within the Southland Land District, rents ranged from 5d to 1s 7d per sheep.<sup>28</sup> The Wakatipu runs in the Otago Land District paid rentals equivalent to between 6d and 7d per sheep. As some revaluations recommended a considerable increase in rent, arbitration was a frequent recourse by runholders who disagreed with their assessments. Rental increases would

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<sup>27</sup> Birchdale and Routeburn runs for instance, both paying an annual rent of £5 per annum since the depression of the 1890s, were re-auctioned in 1910 at the upset prices of £15 and £10 respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Calculated from information contained within official PRL files for Southland and Otago.

also take much of the blame for financial difficulty during economic downturns and heavy stock losses.

The 1907 and 1913 Amendments made no alterations to lease terms and these continued to vary across the district at the discretion of the Land Boards. In the Otago region, some of the more marginal Wakatipu runs, such as Mt Earnslaw, Temple Peak, Mt Creighton, Birchdale and Greenstone were re-let on twenty-one year leases. The rest remained on fourteen-year terms. There is also an indication that some runs were kept in mind for future subdivision. Greenvale and Lorne Peak were re-let on ten year leases in 1901 and then again in 1911 before an abortive subdivision attempt in the early 1920s. Some, such as Halfway Bay and Cainard were re-let on short terms in order to bring their expiry dates in line with neighbouring runs. This caused anxiety as runholders felt it provided inadequate security, particularly when they were paying greatly increased rentals. Between 1916 and 1926, the lease of Run 350b, part of Walter Peak Station, was renewed annually before being added to the adjoining Mt Nicholas run.<sup>29</sup> As such the lease carried no security for improvements, and the Mackenzies only reluctantly accepted this yearly lease at an increased rental.<sup>30</sup> The dissatisfaction remained however, as Hugh Mackenzie declared, ‘that this is a most unsatisfactory and uncertain arrangement for us’.<sup>31</sup> He continued: ‘we have gone to a great deal of expense to improve [the run] and we now feel we have to pay for it’ and that under the present arrangement ‘we are merely in the position of holding on to it by the tail’.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Commission and the Depletion of the Tussock Lands**

The 1905 Land Commission was primarily focused on Crown tenure, and as such, inquiring into the state of the tussock lands upon which pastoral runholding operated was not explicitly laid down in its terms of reference. Nor did the 1905 Commission have the advantage of a scientific viewpoint that the 1920 Southern Pastoral Lands

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<sup>29</sup> Run 350 had been subdivided into three blocks in 1910 – the southern portion (350b) was added to Mt Nicholas in 1926, and runs 350 and 350a were resumed as Elfin Bay Station.

<sup>30</sup> The rental of 350b was increased from £24-10-0 per annum to £40 per annum in 1916.

<sup>31</sup> H Mackenzie & Sons to CCL, Southland, 8 April 1916; DABW/18837/D86/92f, OLM 2338, Run 350B, 1910-1923, ANZ/D.

<sup>32</sup> H Mackenzie & Sons to CCL, Southland, 22 March 1916; OLM 2338; ANZ/D.

Commission possessed. Nevertheless the 1905 Commission's report not only acknowledged that something had to be done to halt the deterioration and foster the recovery of native grasses, but in fact the issue became the central point around which the Commission based its recommendations on pastoral tenure.

The 1905 report recognised the disastrous effects of burning, rabbits and overstocking on the high country, but it also linked the restoration of the deteriorated indigenous tussock and grasslands with the granting of a more secure and fully valued leasehold tenure. Capital was what the runs required and without proper security runholders were unwilling to incur the necessary outlay. For instance, improvements such as subdivision fencing was a large expense but it would encourage the 'spelling' of blocks and foster the recovery of native grasses. James Milne noticed that the 'native grasses' had improved in recent years after subdividing his Fernhill run, as well as improving its carrying capacity.<sup>33</sup> Also, limited winter grazing areas and the lack of winter fodder crops placed greater sustained pressure on the lower native grasslands than the summer mountain country. Surface sowing of English grasses and the right to grow winter-feed on leasehold land would reduce this environmental impact and would increase, or at least justify the present carrying capacities. At no stage did the Commission ever question the place of the runholder and his sheep in the South Island's tussock lands. On the contrary, what was needed in this 'land of very little value except for grazing purposes' was more human agency, the 'willing co-operation of tenants with capital', and more sustainable patterns of grazing to recover what the last sixty-years of runholding had taken away.<sup>34</sup>

The Commission's recommendations are interesting when considered in the context of the contemporary understanding of, and advocacy for, the restoration of the indigenous high country tussock lands. At the start of the twentieth century there was still a great deal to be understood, particularly within the scientific community, as to how patterns of tussock land deterioration took place, how different stock grazed the various plants, and how the most severely denuded lands could, if at all, be rehabilitated. Although John Buchanan and W.T.L Travers had warned of the dangers of repeated burning as early as the 1860s, the 1905 Commission came on the eve of

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<sup>33</sup> James Milne, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 141.

<sup>34</sup> '1905 Crown Lands: Report of the Royal Commission on Land Tenure', *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, xxviii.

the first concerted effort by grassland scientists to 'bring scientific understanding to the management of tussock grasslands.'<sup>35</sup> In 1910, A.H. Cockayne was the first to scientifically examine the effect of burning on tussock lands. Then in 1912 Donald Petrie was commissioned by the Department of Agriculture to publish his *Report on the Grass-Denuded Lands of Central Otago*.<sup>36</sup>

While earlier observers continued to see a place for burning in pasture management, Cockayne and Petrie were more reluctant.<sup>37</sup> A.H. Cockayne was hesitant to sanction the burning of tussock at any stage, except to clear 'undesirable elements' such as fern. While Cockayne acknowledged that firing removed the harsh and inedible tussock and stimulated new palatable growth, he considered that it was 'hardly feasible to look upon burning of tussock lands as a method for the improvement of their constituents'.<sup>38</sup> Donald Petrie also had no trouble identifying the primary causes of deterioration, such as fire, rabbits and overstocking, and their deleterious effects, such as desertification and erosion, but he acknowledged that the 'recuperative power of the native tussock is still little known'. Petrie favoured the complete prohibition of grass-fires in arid districts and that all future leases of pastoral country should have a fixed maximum stocking rate.<sup>39</sup>

Petrie also reserved some criticism for what he saw as the inherent disincentives of the leasehold system and its role in the deterioration of pastures. In his view, tenants under the leasehold system have:

Been placed under the temptation to neglect the keeping-down of rabbits and to overstock during the last year or two of their leases; and it is quite credible

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<sup>35</sup> See J Buchanan, 'Sketch of the Botany of Otago', *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* (hereafter *TNZI*), vol. 1, 1868, 181-212; W.T.L Travers, 'Remarks on a Comparison of the General Features of the Flora of the Provinces of Nelson and Marlborough with that of Canterbury', *TNZI*, vol. 1, 1868, 174-179.

<sup>36</sup> D Petrie, *Report on the Grass-Denuded Lands of Central Otago* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1912)

<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting here however, as O'Connor and Powell point out, both Cockayne and Petrie, were chiefly concerned with burning and the deterioration of lower-altitude tussock country, not the higher snow-tussock grasslands which they considered relatively unaffected by burning owing to the higher rainfall. Leonard Cockayne's groundbreaking study of montane tussock lands in 1919 would reconsider this belief: K.F. O'Connor and Alison J. Powell, 'Studies on the Management of Snow-Tussock Grassland,' *New Zealand Journal of Agricultural Research* 6, no. 5 (1963), 355-56.

<sup>38</sup> A.H. Cockayne, "The Natural Pastures of New Zealand: 1. The effect of burning on tussock country," *New Zealand Journal of Agriculture*, 1 (1910), 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> Petrie, *Report on the Grass-Denuded Lands of Central Otago*, 15.



that the temptation may have proved too alluring to resist. Runholders were too shrewd not to see the dangers of these courses, but were prepared to take the risk.

Given that leasehold was the only viable tenure of pastoral runs, he doubted whether these disadvantages could be overcome, other than by restricting the stocking of runs in order to 'remove the temptation that has led to such serious and possibly irreparable mischief, and make the leasehold tenure little less conducive to continuous prudent management than the freehold itself'.<sup>40</sup>

This is where Petrie and the Commissioners differed slightly. For the Commissioners the leasehold system *per se* was not the problem, but rather if given proper leasehold security, tenants would seek to improve, maintain and exercise 'prudent management' of their runs as much as any freeholder. Wakatipu runholders, James Milne, Francis McBride and Andrew Fraser, were of the opinion that given security and full value for improvements, runholders would expend the necessary capital to bring their holdings into their highest state of productivity.<sup>41</sup>

The Commission and scientific observers both acknowledged the damage done by fire on tussock lands. The Commissioners, however, unlike the scientists, did not make any explicit recommendations regarding the control of burning. As such, official legislative action to restrict the use of fire, like that towards aspects of tenure, was slow in being implemented. It was not until 1913, perhaps influenced by Petrie's report, that the burning of tussock was prohibited, except from July to September, and the burning of snow tussock was completely banned. Only in 1922 was all burning prohibited without the written consent of the district Land Board.

Within the Wakatipu, assessing the frequency and scale of tussock burning in the early decades of the twentieth century is difficult. In front of the 1905 Commission, Wakatipu runholders did not offer any clues but nor were they asked on the matter in questioning. Certainly the annual sheep returns testify to the reduced carrying capacity of the runs and dramatic impact of sheep and fire on indigenous vegetation.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James Milne, 142; Francis McBride, 152; Andrew Fraser, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905.

The brief official descriptions of the runs as they were re-auctioned in the first decade of the twentieth century also give some indications, generally noting the thinning vegetation cover, the bare mountain tops and in some cases running shingle.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand the period under discussion was also a time of restocking on many runs after the economic depression of the 1880s and 1890s.

Within official files, concern over firing was most likely to be raised when it threatened native bush not, as one might expect, when done in an indiscriminate manner on tussock land. In mid-December 1909, Frank McBride of Earnslaw Station was ordered to put out a blaze. His sons had been warned the previous year after fire endangered nearby bush.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, in 1912 Henry Field Elliot of Routeburn Station was warned after the owner of a local sawmill complained about the 'indiscriminate burning' being done, mainly in fern, but also close to bush.<sup>44</sup> In 1920 the Meiklejohns of Mt Creighton Station were cautioned against burning near recreational reserves on the lake front as they contained 'small patches of bush, isolated cabbage trees and other patches of green that add to the beauty of the lake'.<sup>45</sup> Another instance of apparent official indifference to tussock fires occurred in 1918 when a tussock fire raged on Ben Lomond Station for three days burning over 1,000 acres of winter country. Leaseholder, Leo Lee, claimed that police were slow in mobilising a force to extinguish the blaze, and to find the culprit who started it, because it was only tussock burning and not bush.<sup>46</sup>

Rabbit numbers and their control continued to be largely dictated by the availability of labour, the demand for skins and the will of the landowner. Local newspapers regularly carried advertisements for trappers and poisoners.<sup>47</sup> A local rabbit inspector monitored the pest's numbers and several runholders, including James McLean of Routeburn and Thomas Muir of Coronet Peak, were prosecuted for failing to keep

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<sup>42</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, No. 4, January 15, 1903, 135.

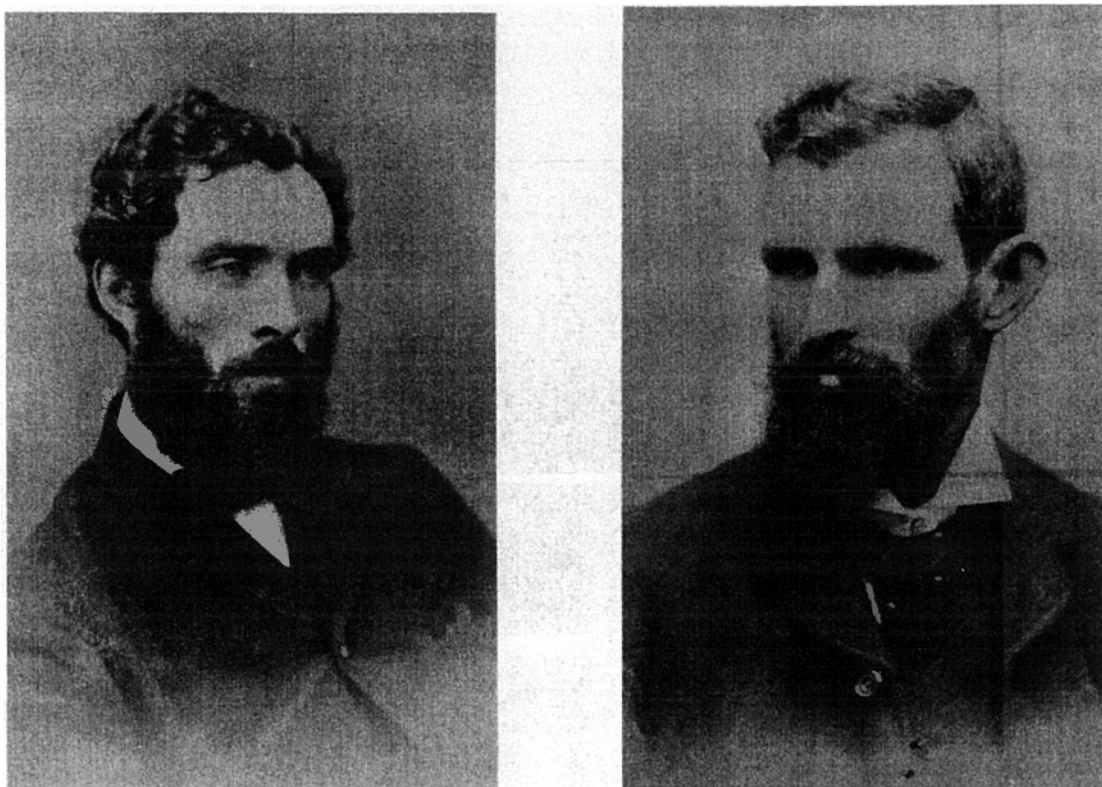
<sup>43</sup> CCL, Otago to Frank McBride, 12 November 1909; Folio 15; PR 1301, Earnslaw 1906-1947; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>44</sup> W. Grant, Kinloch Sawmill, to CCL, Otago, 24 December 1912; Folio 70; PR 1855 Vol. 1, Routeburn 1896-1932; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>45</sup> Crown Lands Ranger to CCL, Otago, 20 October 1924; PR 1278, Mt Creighton 1902-1924; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>46</sup> Telegram from Leo Lee to CCL, Otago, 9 March 1918; PR 1931 Vol. 1, Ben Lomond 1904-1939; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>47</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 17 December 1907; 26 January 1909; 14 November 1911; 26 March 1918; *Lake County Press*, 14 March 1910.



**Fig. (2.2)**

Alexander Meiklejohn (left) and his eldest son John of Mt Creighton Station

The Meiklejohn family settled on the lakefront at Mt Creighton in 1868, running cattle before introducing sheep. The Mt Creighton run passed to John in 1894 following his mother's death. A new license over runs 9 and 9a was issued in 1903 under John and his brother Alexander's names. John and Alex Meiklejohn held Mt Creighton until 1922.

Original: M.M. Trotter  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

rabbits down.<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly the rabbit problem worsened during the First World War as the pastoral labour force was depleted. In 1919 the Glenorchy correspondent of the *Lake Wakatip Mail* claimed that rabbiting was the 'best paying industry at the moment' due to the high skin prices and the wartime shortage of labour allowing their numbers to increase.<sup>49</sup>

### **'This country is too mountainous for small runs': Pastoral Subdivision and Amalgamation**

Pastoral subdivision was a salient feature of the South Island high country during the first decades of the twentieth century. Under the 1892 Land Act, as the leases of runs fell due they were re-classified according to their suitability for closer settlement. Despite continuing demands for the subdivision of the better pastoral runs, by the turn of the century it was recognised within the Lands and Survey Department that in some areas the upper limits of pastoral subdivision in Otago were being reached. In 1902 the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, David Barron, warned that there 'is absolutely no new low-lying country that can be safely taken from pastoral runs for closer settlement' and the sooner that this fact 'is faced by all concerned the better it will be ... for the future administration of the public estate'.<sup>50</sup>

Within the evidence supplied to the 1905 Land Commission, opinion was divided in the Lakes District on the suitability of subdividing pastoral runs into smaller holdings. Most attention was focused on the massive Morven Hills run in Tuapeka County, but the 60,000-acre Coronet Peak Station also elicited comment. Some Wakatipu residents wanted the runs cut up into smaller areas, while others considered the country suitable only for large runs and therefore were adequate in their present state.<sup>51</sup> Across Otago and Southland the Commission heard calls for the subdivision of large runs, and to a lesser extent large estates.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 10 December 1907, 4 February 1908.

<sup>49</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 24 June 1919.

<sup>50</sup> 'Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago', *AJHR*, C-1, 1902, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Luke Hogarth, 153; James George, 151; George McKenzie, 150; John Edgar, 151-152, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, 151-152.

<sup>52</sup> In Otago, thirty witnesses called for the subdivision and closer settlement of large runs, while only three testified against the further subdivision of pastoral runs: *AJHR*, C-4B, 1905, 20-21.

The Commissioners report, however, did not advocate further subdivision but rather hinted that the subdivision of pastoral runs had in some cases gone too far. Low-lying winter country had been detached from the summer blocks, leaving some runs precariously positioned. To correct this imbalance, the report stated that 'it may be necessary to purchase some of the lower country back again'.<sup>53</sup> Some criticism was also levelled at the small grazing runs, whereby 'they have been promoted to some extent to the detriment of the higher country held under pastoral tenure'. Moreover it was regretted that there was no provision for the resumption of small grazing runs at the end of their twenty-one year lease, to either re-attach the land onto pastoral runs or for further closer settlement purposes.<sup>54</sup>

During the first round of pastoral subdivision, the Wakatipu runs mainly owing to their mountainous nature, and limited winter country, escaped the attentions of the Lands and Survey Department. Between 1900 and 1912, nearly all of the existing Wakatipu runs were declared (at this stage) unsuitable for subdivision, re-classified as Class A or I pastoral land, and then re-let at auction. There were some alterations, however, the most notable being on Kawarau Falls. The country south of Staircase Creek (Run 331a) was subdivided into two blocks, which when combined with parts of the old Kawarau Station formed two Class B runs fronting Lake Wakatipu on the west and the Nevis River on the east.<sup>55</sup> The large Fernhill (Run 350) block of the Mackenzies Walter Peak Station was subdivided into three portions in 1910, but the action was inconsequential as the southern portion was retained by the Mackenzies to be worked with Mt Nicholas and the northern two blocks were re-let as Elfin Bay Station.

In fact, by way of several amalgamations, the general trend over the period was for stations to become larger and slightly fewer in number (maps 2.1 and 2.2). In 1904-5, the Fernhill and Mt Nicholas blocks were absorbed into the Mackenzies Walter Peak Station, bringing its total area to 166,978 acres. In 1905 Alex Mackenzie of the Precipice run took possession of the adjoining Wyuna run when the leaseholder sold

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<sup>53</sup> '1905 Crown Lands: Report of the Royal Commission on Land Tenure', *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, xxiv.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, xxv.

<sup>55</sup> These became Loch Linnhe (354a) and Glen Nevis (354b) runs. The core of Kawarau Falls Station (Run 331) was compensated to a degree with the addition of 4,000 acres from adjoining runs.

up. The two runs were officially grouped and leased as Wyuna Station in 1916. David McKinlay, holder of Run 12 since 1888, acquired the neighbouring Ben Lomond run (No. 10) at auction in 1902. Stuart Duke of 25-Mile added Run 11 through transfer in 1903 and then Run 12a in 1910 when it was detached from Run 12. Mt Alfred, worked as a stand-alone unit since the mid-1880s, was absorbed into Earnslaw Station in 1917. In 1910, despite being the focus of questioning by the 1905 Land Commission for its possible subdivision, the seven runs that comprised the various parts of Coronet Peak Station since the 1880s were formally amalgamated into the 50,700-acre Run 27.<sup>56</sup>

Although more runs were being officially ‘grouped’ together and held under a single pastoral license (The Branches, Cecil Peak and Mt Aurum for example), other runholders continued to hold and work several separate leaseholds. Unlike grouped holdings, each run was held under its own pastoral license, had its own rental, and had to be won back separately at auction. Although under the 1908 Land Act, the official position was ‘one man one run,’ the district Land Boards generally recommended for approval to the Minister of Lands the amalgamation of two or more marginal runs. Until the early-1920s, the Mackenzies held four Pastoral Run Licenses, covering seven runs, and three temporary licenses. In 1910, Henry Scott of Rees Valley was granted permission to hold the neighbouring Temple Peak run (No. 14). This block had been part of Rees Valley since the mid-1890s on account of it being very high and difficult to work, ‘infested with keas’, and the two units could not pay if worked separately.<sup>57</sup>

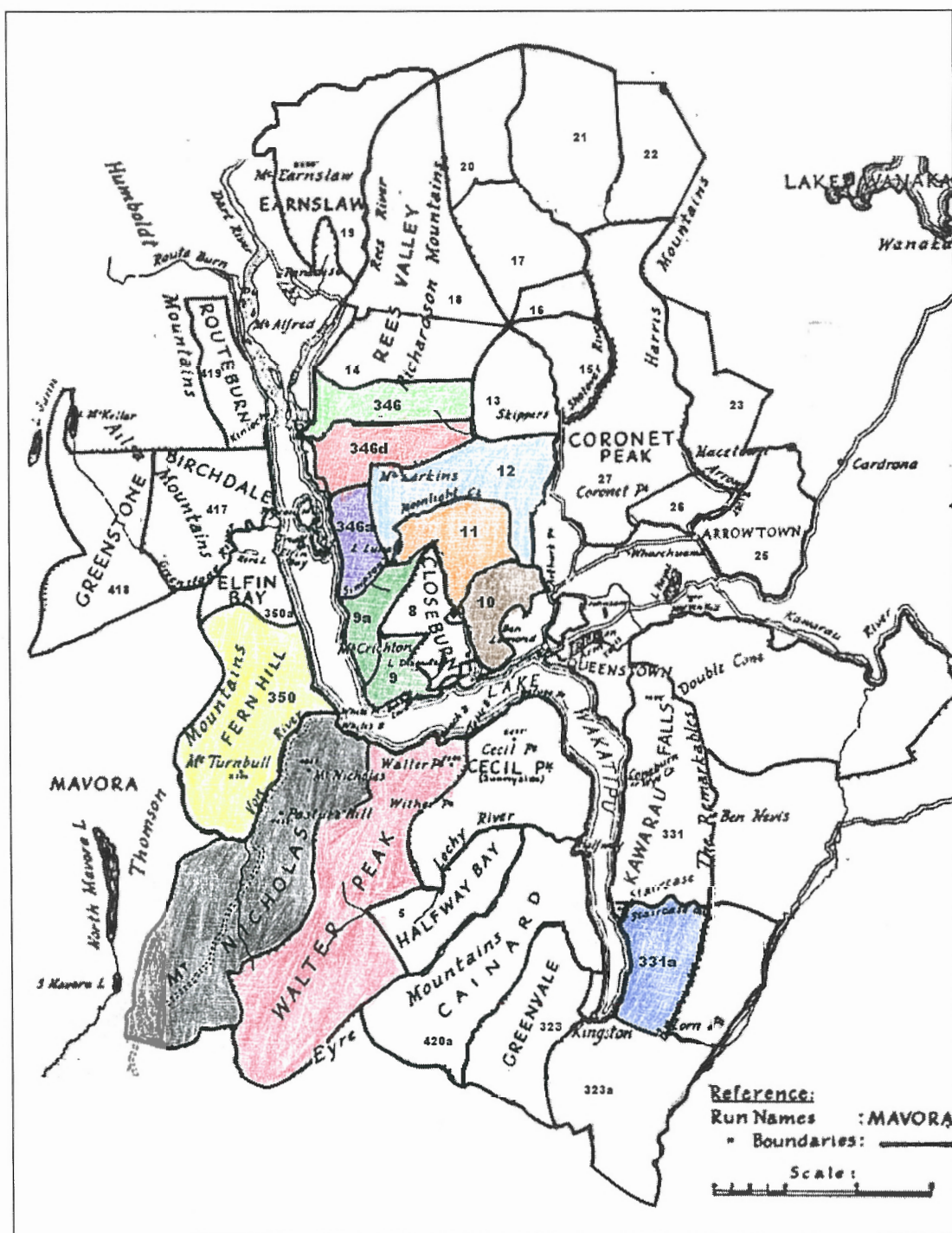
Officials were alert, however, to cases where an amalgamation of properties was considered contrary to legislation aimed at preventing the aggregation of leaseholds. In 1910 an aging and ill Alexander McLean proposed transferring his Birchgrove (later Halfway Bay) run to the neighbouring leaseholder of Cecil Peak Station, H.D.

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<sup>56</sup> This run along with the ‘German Hill’ run (Run 26) formed Coronet Peak Station, stretching from the Shotover River in the west to the Arrow River in the East and extending north thirty miles into the mountainous headwaters of the Shotover catchment.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Scott to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Otago, 26 February 1910, Donald Reid & Co. Letter Book, 1908-25, Box 3, Reid Farmers Records, Hocken Library, 108.



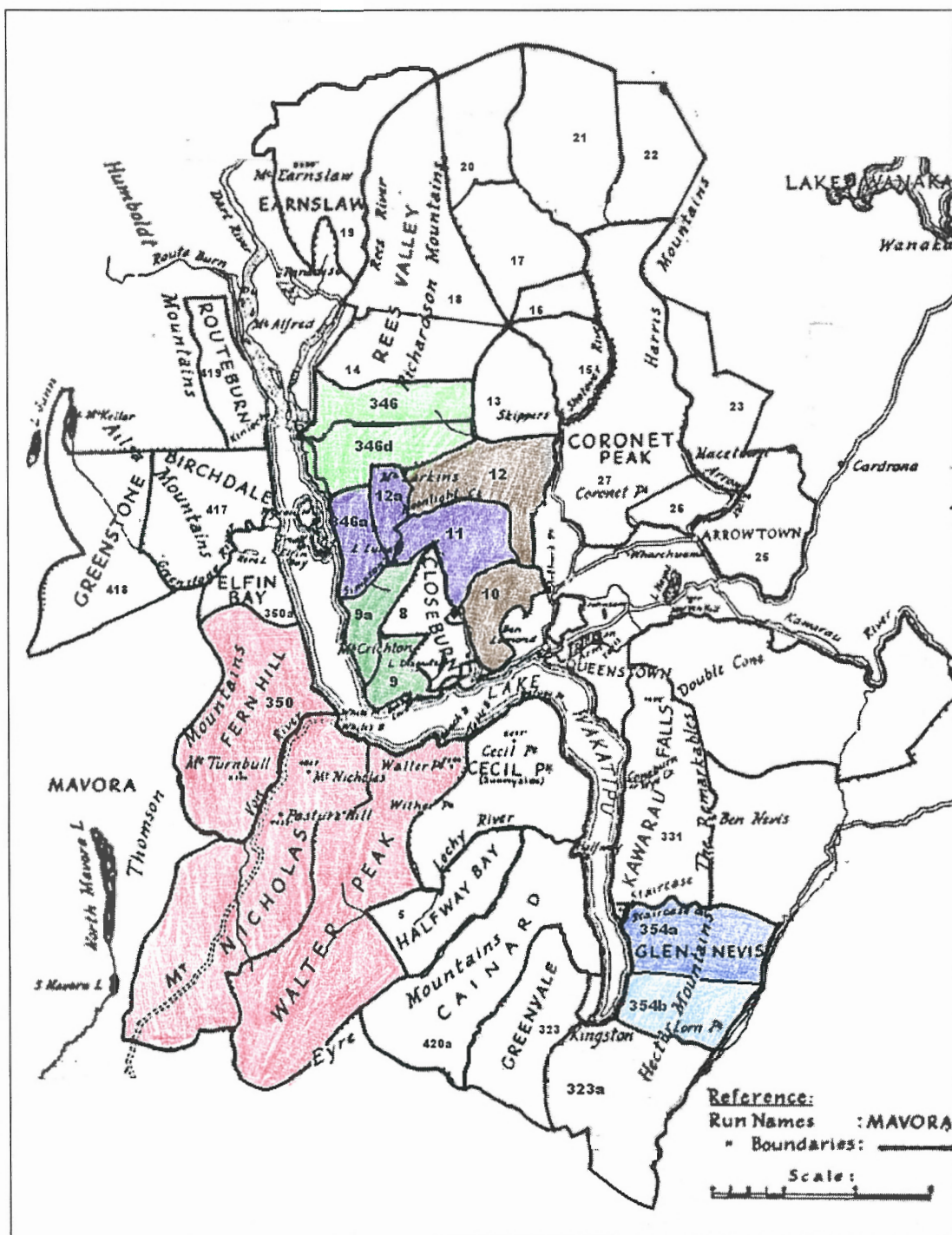


Map (2.1)

**Map Showing the Wakatipu Runs in 1900 before Extensive Amalgamations.**

It was common in 1900 for many runs to be held singly. Runs 346 and 346d were held separately as the Precipice and Wyuna runs respectively. Run 10 was held by Francis F. McBride, Run 11 by Alexander Paterson and Run 12 by David McKinley. Runs 9 and 9a formed the Meiklejohn's Mt Creighton Station while 346a was Stuart Duke's 25-Mile run. On the western shore, James Milne owned Fern Hill (350); the Southland Land Board held the Mt Nicholas leasehold and the Mackenzie's operated Walter Peak Station. Run 331a at the southern end of the lake was part of Kawarau Falls Station (331).

Map adapted from Florence Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipu*, (Dunedin: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1947). Annotated by the author.



Map (2.2)

### Map Showing the Wakatipu Runs in 1920 after Extensive Amalgamations

Most amalgamations took place on the runs between Glenorchy and Queenstown. In 1905, Run 346d was joined with Run 346 to form Wyuna Station. Run 12 was added to Run 10 in 1902 to form Ben Lomond Station. Stuart Duke of 25-Mile (Run 346a) added Run 11 in 1903 and then Run 12a in 1910. 25-Mile was in-turn absorbed into Mt Creighton in 1922. Mt Alfred was included in Mt Earnslaw in 1917. Fern Hill and Mt Nicholas runs became part of Walter Peak Station in 1905. Finally, Run 331a was taken from Kawarau Falls, subdivided into two runs (354a and b) and auctioned off in 1910.

Map adapted from Florence Mackenzie, *The Sparkling Waters of Whakatipua*, (Dunedin: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1947). Annotated by the author.



Were.<sup>58</sup> Despite exhibiting some disagreement over the matter, the Southland Land Board eventually refused the application on the grounds that the two runs were 'sufficient to make a good living on' and the aggregation of two runs would be 'against the present trend of legislation'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Settlement and Occupation Patterns in the Wakatipu High Country: 1900-1920**

The small amount of subdivision and the aggregation of several runs into others did not mean that pastoral ownership and settlement in the Wakatipu had become relatively stable by the turn of the century. Although the Wakatipu high country did not see a new wave of post-1910 runholders entering onto subdivided runs, there was nevertheless a considerable changing of ownership throughout the period as runholders retired, moved out of the district or died. The geographical and social patterns of occupation established in the 1880s and 1890s, however, would largely persist. Between 1900 and 1920, excluding fourteen inter-familial transfers, there were forty-two changes of ownership across twenty-five Wakatipu stations. Coronet Peak changed hands seven times, while the Routeburn run was transferred six times in twenty years.

The majority of the runholders in 1900 had taken up their runs in the 1880s and 1890s. A few, such as the Meiklejohns and Stuart Duke of Mt Creighton, W.S. Trotter of Greenvale, John Wither of Sunnyside and William Paterson of Ayrburn had been there since the 1860s and 1870s. Most were Scottish by birth, of humble origins and had taken up cheap runs at 'peppercorn' rentals during the economic depression of the 1880s and 1890s. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, nearly all of these runholders would transfer their license. As in the nineteenth century, those who replaced them were typically heterogeneous in their backgrounds and experience. There was a mixture of men from local families to buyers from outside of the region; many possessed the high country background and experience of the archetypical

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<sup>58</sup> Perhaps fearing the reaction of the Land Board to a transfer to a man already occupying a large run, the application was filed under Mrs Were's name on the grounds that she was 'putting her own money into the affair'.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of Land Board Meeting, 28 July 1910 & CCL, Southland to Undersecretary of Crown Lands, 10 August 1910; DABW/18837/D86/99h, PRL 403, Halfway Bay 1904-1940; ANZ/D.

shepherd-runholder but there were also urban mercantile buyers and syndicates; most runholders were resident but the number of absentees increased slightly; some of the new runholders came from abiding runholding families with long standing ties in the working and owning of high country properties, while others came from a background in family farming. Experience in farming, if not the high country, was almost universal.

What is apparent as licenses changed hands was the greater incidence of inter-familial occupation of runs. This practice was much more common in the twentieth century than the nineteenth. Few licenses, however, were transmitted to family members while the runholder was alive. For those that were, in some cases a modified form of primogeniture was practiced, with the run being transferred to the eldest son. Alexander Elliot of Elfin Bay applied to transfer his lease to his son, Roy Elliot in 1914, on account of being too old to work the run, and expressing his desire to hand the property over to his son.<sup>60</sup> In 1904, James McLean, holder of the Birchgrove run, transferred his license to his two youngest sons, Duncan Angus and Alexander McLean.<sup>61</sup> James McLean's other Wakatipu run, the Routeburn Station, was transferred to Duncan Angus McLean and then sold in 1910. Transferring to immediate family was another option. The Closeburn run near Queenstown was transferred from Alex Cameron to his brother-in-law, Peter McCormack in 1905. On Wyuna Station, Alex Mackenzie, brother of Hugh (Senior) of Walter Peak, transferred his run to his nephew Peter Mackenzie and niece Margaret Mackenzie in 1907.<sup>62</sup>

A further alternative for runholders was to include their sons and sometimes daughters in partnership. This not only reflected the importance of the family unit in the operation of the runs, but also provided the children with a financial share in the property. When Fernhill and Mt Nicholas were added to Walter Peak in 1905, the new leases were registered under the partnership of H. Mackenzie and Sons, which also

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<sup>60</sup> Application to Transfer License, 18 August 1914; DABW/18837/D86/107e, PRL 466, Elfin Bay 1909-1933, ANZ/D.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander bought out his older brother's share in 1907 and managed the property until its sale in 1911: 'James McLean to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 3 June 1904', PRL 403; James McLean – Birchgrove, 'Runs A-B', Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Mackenzie, a cousin of Peter and Margaret was brought in as a partner and to manage the run. Mackenzie, *Memories of Walter Peak, Mt Nicholas and Fernhill Stations*, 32.

included the two Mackenzie daughters.<sup>63</sup> Glencoe Station was leased to John Edie and his three sons in 1915. Henry Adams bought Earnslaw Station from his brothers in 1920, and although it appears only his name was on the lease, the business was carried out under the name H. Adams and Sons. William Paterson's extensive runholding interests in Ayrburn, Mt Soho and West Dome were registered under 'W.M. Paterson and Son', which included his son, R.M. Paterson, but also three daughters.<sup>64</sup>

In many other cases it appears runholders made no attempt to make arrangements for the continued working of a run, such as a transfer, outside of what was provided in their will. Although the small number of Wakatipu runholders who died in possession makes it difficult to generalise about any inheritance patterns among runholders, it seems the deceased runholders intended the property to remain in family control. The deceased's widow or eldest son was generally appointed executor or administrator of the deceased's estate, but the run was often held in partnership between siblings to either continue working the property or to arrange for its sale. Usually the transition was seamless as the family members were already fully involved in the operation of the property. John Meiklejohn, the eldest son, became sole executor of his mother's estate in 1894, but a new pastoral license for Mt Creighton, issued in 1903, was registered under the names of the two Meiklejohn brothers. The brothers held the property until its sale in 1922. Similarly James McKinlay, the eldest son, took over Ben Lomond after his father's death in 1904. He acquired the station in his own name in 1907, and operated it, 'in partnership' with his mother and brothers, until its sale in 1917.<sup>65</sup> John Patrick McBride and Beatrice McBride were appointed co-executors of their father's estate, but the Kawarau Falls leasehold and 6,000 acres of freehold were transmitted to John while Beatrice was provided for separately.<sup>66</sup>

Where runholders died as bachelors arrangements were made for the transition of a run. Stuart Duke left his 25-Mile leasehold and farm to his brother, John Duke, and his manager, Allan Manson. The future profits of the station, after paying Manson a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>64</sup> In Paterson's case however, the partnership was probably more a means of circumventing legislation that prevented the ownership of more than one pastoral run; Paterson Probate File, 24241, (1910) DAAC/9075, ANZ/D.

<sup>65</sup> McKinlay Probate File, 1311, (1904) DAFG/9066, ANZ/D.

<sup>66</sup> McBride Probate File, 3600, (1914) DAFG/9066, ANZ/D.

‘fair and reasonable salary’, were to be divided between Duke’s brother and two sisters in Scotland. When John Duke died, Allan Manson had the option of purchasing the property at half the assessed value, the proceeds being split between the Duke sisters.<sup>67</sup> Widows were also entrusted with the carrying on of high country properties. G.D. Baird, the leaseholder of Mt Soho run, and owner of the Bendemeer Estate, left his wife as sole executor of his estate.<sup>68</sup> Bessie Baird held the Mt Soho leasehold until her death in 1931. The license of Greenvale Station was transmitted to Robert Elliot Matheson’s widow following his death in 1919. Margaret Matheson was empowered to ‘carry on my farming and grazing business or businesses and to manage, cultivate and make profitable’.<sup>69</sup>

During this period there also appears to be a high degree of mobility among runholders and station managers. This suggests that the transition between managing and owning a station was not great. J.W. Miller owned Elfin Bay Station between 1919 and 1922, while managing Coronet Peak for several owners. Several sons of Donald Manson, a nephew of W.S. Trotter, and a long-time station manager for the N.Z.L.M.A. Company in the late nineteenth century, were ubiquitous names in the Wakatipu high country. Andrew Mowat Manson and John Robert Manson took up The Branches Station in 1912. Another son, Alan Waiau Manson was a manager and then partner in Twenty-Five Mile and Mt Creighton Stations, as was John. Henry Manson managed Elfin Bay between 1919-1922 for J.W. Miller, who was himself managing Coronet Peak.<sup>70</sup> Robert Lambie not only worked as a musterer on his brother’s Mt Aurum run but also managed Coronet Peak Station for Thomas Muir and then Mt Aurum Station for the Paterson’s between 1917 and 1919.<sup>71</sup> Families also continued to enter in and out of runholding as opportunity permitted. Coronet Peak Station passed out of the Baird family in 1907, but G.D. Baird took up the neighbouring Mt Soho run on the Crown Range two years later. William Paterson sold up the Ayrburn leasehold in 1906, but his son, R.M. Paterson, bought Mt Aurum Station in 1917.

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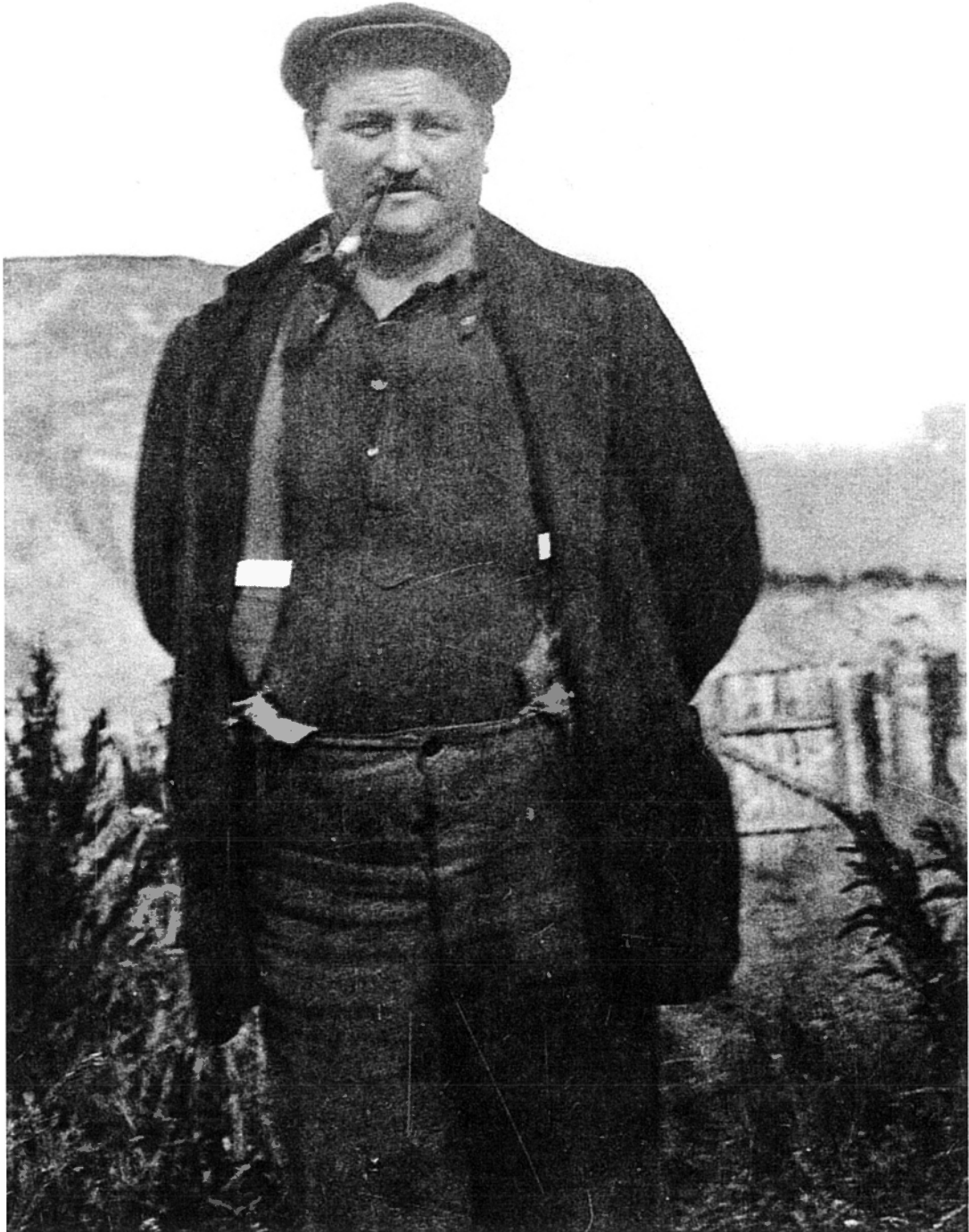
<sup>67</sup> Duke Probate File, 4041, (1916) DAFG/9066, ANZ/D.

<sup>68</sup> Baird Probate File, 6260, (1919) DAAC/D239, ANZ/D.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Matheson’s sons became co-executors upon attaining the age of twenty-one: Matheson Probate File, 193/19, (1919) DAFG/9067, ANZ/D.

<sup>70</sup> Manson Family, ‘Runs A-B,’ Peter Chandler Research Papers.

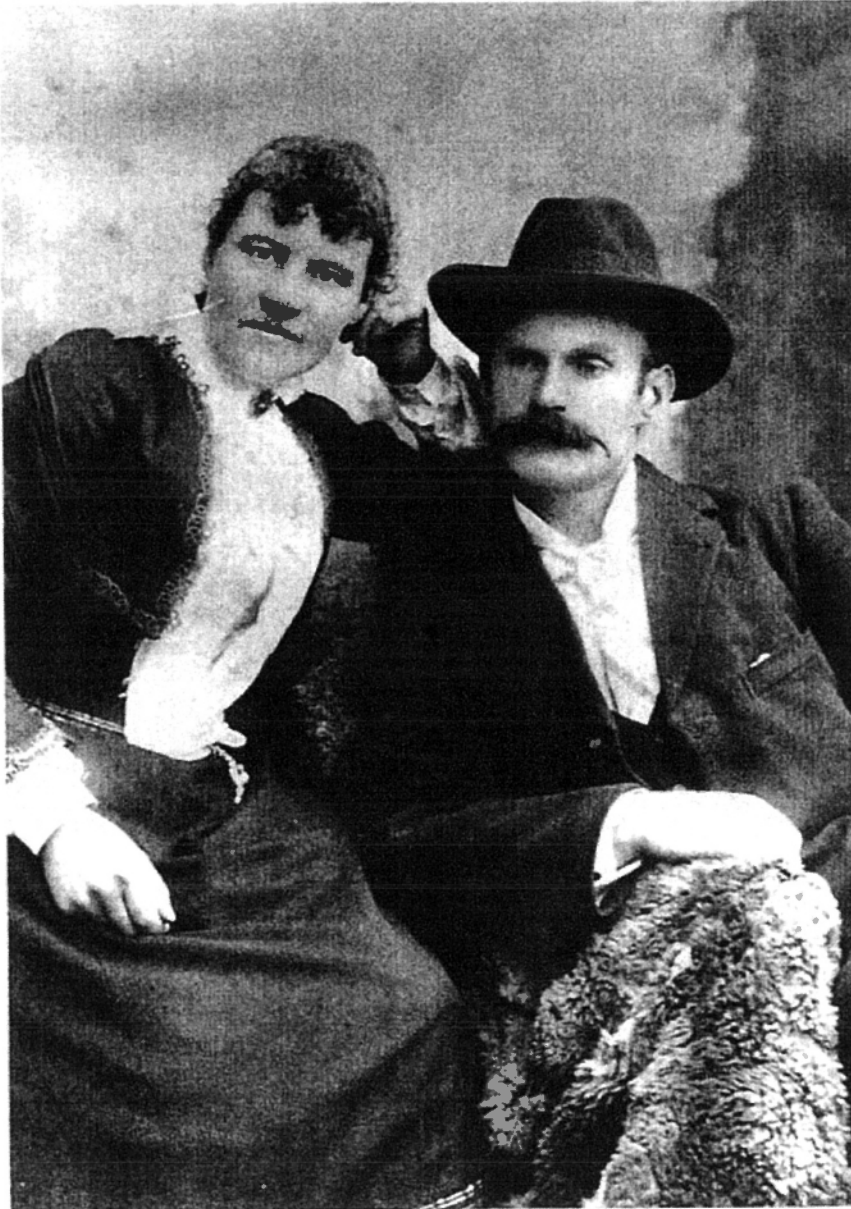
<sup>71</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 4 February 1908; Chandler, ‘Promised Land of Rees (I)’, unpublished manuscript.



**Fig. (2.3)**

Alan Waiau Manson, manager of 25-Mile Station for Stuart Duke and then owner of 25-Mile between 1920 and 1922. Alan Manson's brothers managed and owned several runs around the Wakatipu.

Original: D Watherston  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library



**Fig (2.4)**

‘Cousin’ Peter and Alice Mackenzie, Wyuna Station.

Alexander Mackenzie, brother of Hugh Mackenzie senior of Walter Peak Station, transferred the license of Wyuna Station to his nephew Peter Mackenzie and niece Margaret Mackenzie in 1907. Their cousin Peter Mackenzie (above) was brought in as a partner and to manage the property. Wyuna was sold to J O’Connell in 1917.

Original: Mrs J. Phelan  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

Another feature of the social makeup of the Wakatipu high country between 1900 and 1920 were the forays by Canterbury runholders and farmers into the district. James Burnett, who bought Halfway Bay Station in 1913, was a typical shepherd-runholder.<sup>72</sup> Considered an 'exceptionally good shepherd', Burnett worked on the famous Longlands Station in Otago, managed Ben Ohau Station in the Mackenzie country for James Preston during the 1890s and then owned Birch Hill Station on the foot of Mount Cook in the Tasman Valley between 1898 and 1903.<sup>73</sup> By 1912, and now in his late 30s, Burnett was typical of many men who after working on, managing and operating various high country stations for most of his adult life, wanted to make a permanent home for himself.<sup>74</sup> The Southland Land Board certainly appreciated the value of a high-quality tenant, with one member of the Board remarking that 'we are getting a good man in Mr Burnett'.<sup>75</sup>

Between 1911 and 1913, Coronet Peak was briefly owned by two partnerships with Canterbury connections.<sup>76</sup> From 1906 to 1948 Cecil Peak Station (formerly Sunnyside) was successively held by three Canterbury sheepfarmers. Henry Dawson Were, bought Cecil Peak Station in 1906 from John Wither. Were, an Englishman, had been a cadet on Glentanner Station in the Tasman Valley (perhaps under L.G.D Acland, a future owner of Cecil Peak), before buying Birch Hill from James Burnett in 1903. In 1915, Were, desiring to go to the front, transferred his lease of Cecil Peak to South Canterbury sheepfarmers Robert Craig Gillies and Emily Gillies. Their tenure was short, transferring in 1917 to L.G.D Acland and Hugh Maude Reeves. Leopold Acland had owned Glentanner Station between 1898 and 1904 and then Braemar Station from 1906 to 1911, making a handsome profit from the latter.<sup>77</sup> Hugh

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<sup>72</sup> *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: Volume 3 (Canterbury)*, (Wellington: Cyclopaedia Publishing Co, 1905), 964.

<sup>73</sup> Spiers, 'Preston Runholding in the Maniototo and Mackenzie 1878-1917', 124.

<sup>74</sup> Land Board Meeting, 27 July 1912; PRL 403 Halfway Bay.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> In 1911 Pitman and Son bought the property from Thomas Muir. The father, Henry Herbert Pitman was a former manager of Otaio Station in South Canterbury. The Pitman's sold in 1913 to Arthur John Blakiston and Francis Clissold Knubley. Blakiston was a relation to and manager of Charles Tripp's 'Orari Gorge' Station while Francis Knubley was a manager of the large Glenarary Station in Southland. Again these two were in possession of Coronet Peak for only a matter of months before transferring, perhaps due to stock losses in the 1913 winter. Acland, *The Early Canterbury Runs*, 193; A.J. Blakiston, *My Yesteryears*, (Timaru: Herald Co., 1952) – oddly Blakiston makes no mention of his very short tenure of Coronet Peak Station in his autobiography.

<sup>77</sup> Acland, *The Early Canterbury Runs*, 9.



Reeves was the son of politician William Reeves and editor of the Christchurch *Star* newspaper.<sup>78</sup>

The widespread change of ownership brought a new injection of capital into the stations. For instance, the purchasers of Cecil Peak Station L.G.D. Acland and Hugh Reeves possessed £9,000 and £10,000 in cash respectively.<sup>79</sup> The inclusion of surface sowing as a compensatory improvement in 1907 encouraged some runholders to embark on large surface sowing programmes. In 1910, H.D. Were of Cecil Peak requested permission to surface sow approximately 3,200 acres of fern covered lake frontage, from Table Bay to Halfway Bay, down McKinlay's Creek and along the Lochy River.<sup>80</sup> Duncan King, a Winton farmer and Southland Land Board member, who bought Cainard in 1914, was given permission to burn and surface sow 2,000 acres of 'ferny ridges' along the lake front.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Economics of High Country Farming in the Wakatipu 1900-1920**

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Wakatipu remained a pastoral dominated district. Most of Lake County's sheep were on the pastoral runs. Twenty-four Wakatipu runs accounted for nearly seventy per cent of the total Lake District sheep flock.<sup>82</sup> Yet owners of over 1,000 sheep accounted for only around thirty per cent of all Lake County sheepowners. Sheep numbers across the Wakatipu runs increased from 110,146 in 1900, to reach a peak of 181,413 by 1916 before declining to 151,580 in 1920 following the particularly severe winter of 1918 (Table 1).<sup>83</sup> Stocking levels on individual stations varied, but increases were generally seen across the region. In some cases a deliberate policy of overstocking may have been pursued while in others it was the re-utilisation of country that had been destocked during the economic depression of the late nineteenth century. Runholders took advantage of the large clearing sales at Morven Hills and Kawarau Stations in 1910 to purchase quality

<sup>78</sup> *Cyclopedia*, (Canterbury), 238.

<sup>79</sup> Application to Transfer Lease, 15 August 1917, 256/60; PRL 387, Cecil Peak.

<sup>80</sup> H.D. Were to CCL, Southland, 5 February 1910; PRL 387, Cecil Peak.

<sup>81</sup> Duncan King to CCL, Southland, 30 September 1914, 248/11; DABW/18837/D86/101b, PRL 413, Cainard 1903-33, ANZ/D.

<sup>82</sup> This figure would be even greater if one takes into account the Wanaka/Lake Hawea runs, and those runs in the south-west of Lake County.

<sup>83</sup> Figures are taken from 25 runs.





Leopold George Dyke Acland, Cecil Peak Station, 1918-1948.

Photo: Steffano Webb



**Fig (2.5)**

Hugh Maude Reeves – Part owner of Cecil Peak Station (with L.G.D. Acland),  
1918-1922.

Original: J Peake  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

Merino and half-bred stock. The Mackenzies bought 4,000 sheep at the Kawarau sale and Henry Scott of Rees Valley purchased 988 wethers.<sup>84</sup> Walter Peak's sheep numbers increased from 7,500 in 1905 to 23,200 in 1920 following the additions of the Mt Nicholas and Fernhill blocks. On Ben Lomond the flock increased by 3,330 and Closeburn's by 2,233 within fifteen years. Andrew Lambie, the first runholder to fully restock Mt Aurum increased his sheep numbers by over thirty per cent between taking possession in 1901 and selling up in 1916. In 1905 Greenvale and Lorne Peak, held under the estate of W.S. Trotter, carried just over 6,500 sheep between them, the majority most likely on the Greenvale block. Leased as separate units from 1906, the two runs had a combined total of 17,198 sheep in 1920.

The increase in sheep numbers in the early part of the twentieth century was matched by a sustained rise in wool prices (Table 2). Merino wools, after falling from the 1860s to 1890s, initially recovered first before American demand for half-bred fleeces stimulated prices. Over the four years to 1916, the average price stayed above 10d per lb.<sup>85</sup> Kawarau Falls Merino topped Donald Reid's catalogue at the third Dunedin wool sale of the 1902-03 season, fetching 10¼d per lb.<sup>86</sup> By 1913, top Wakatipu half-bred fleeces were selling for 12d to 13d per lb, and the best Merino from 11d to 11½d per lb. While most Wakatipu stations consigned their wool to the Dunedin sales, the Mackenzies of Walter Peak continued to ship directly to London. In 1911, eighty bales of scoured wool brought 1s 11½d per lb. while another 200 bales averaged 1s 10d per lb.<sup>87</sup> The quality of Walter Peak's wool was such that the Mackenzies topped the London wool sales on three occasions.<sup>88</sup> At the last public auctions before the Commandeer took effect in late-1916, Wakatipu halfbred and crossbred wool was reaching highs of between 17d and 18d per lb.<sup>89</sup> Mt Earnslaw Station's clip averaged

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<sup>84</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 22 March 1910; Diary 1910; Rees Valley - H Scott Notes and Diaries, Wakatipu Runs Research: Runs, Diaries and Accounts, Peter Chandler Research Papers, (MS-1270-2-3/007), Hocken Library.

<sup>85</sup> Carter & McGibbon, *Wool*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Third Wool Sale, 29 January 1903, *Donald Reid Farmers Circular*, in 'Rees Valley - Wool Returns 1901-1920', Wakatipu Runs Research: Miscellaneous, Peter Chandler Research Papers, (MS-1270-2-4/008), Hocken Library.

<sup>87</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 26 September 1911.

<sup>88</sup> Mackenzie, *Memories of Walter Peak*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> *Lake County Press*, 10 February 1916, 5.

17d at the second Dunedin wool sale in 1916.<sup>90</sup> Merino prices lagged behind slightly, however, with Mt Creighton Merino fetching around 14d per lb.

With such buoyant prices, the proposal to Commandeer wool at 1913/14 prices with a forty-five per cent premium was unpopular with woolgrowers. Prices for medium Merino, super halfbreds and super crossbreds had risen around seventy-five per cent on 1913/14 averages.<sup>91</sup> An offer was finally accepted with a fifty-five percent premium of 1913/14 prices. Under the War Commandeer system, it appears that the Wakatipu clips were, like most woolgrowers, given favourable valuations by Government appointed assessors. In 1917 Rees Valley's wool cheque amounted to a net return of £2,076, an average of over 14d per lb for 103 bales.<sup>92</sup> Several other growers were credited with up to 17¾d, with one receiving 21½d for a line.<sup>93</sup> The sheep losses sustained in the winter of 1918, meant the Wakatipu clips for 1919 were considerably lighter than in previous years. Rees Valley submitted 76 bales for sale in 1919, around 30 bales fewer than usual, with net returns amounting to £1,364.<sup>94</sup> The war commandeer lasted until September 1920. Thereafter prices rose briefly before plummeting by the end of the year.

The other major impact of the First World War on the operation of the Wakatipu runs was the exodus of much of the pastoral labour force from the region. The Wakatipu high country was quickly suffering from a shortage of manpower. As early as the fall muster of 1915, runholders in the Skippers had found many of their reliable and experienced musterers, who were familiar with the terrain, had gone to the front.<sup>95</sup> Conscription, introduced in 1916, drew even more men away. By 1917 the call to military service was causing the Sheepowners' Union Executive such grave concern, that they called for the retention of sufficient numbers of young men with high country experience.<sup>96</sup> The end of 1917 afforded a measure of relief, with the Military

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<sup>90</sup> *Lake County Press*, 17 February 1916, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Carter & McGibbon, *Wool*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> The highest price realised was 18¾d; Wool Returns 1917, in 'Rees Valley - Wool Returns 1901-1920', Peter Chandler Research Papers.

<sup>93</sup> *Lake County Press*, 8 March 1917, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Wool Returns 1919, Rees Valley - Wool Returns 1901-1920, Peter Chandler Research Papers.

<sup>95</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 4 May 1915.

<sup>96</sup> Otago & Southland Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers (O&S SIUE) Annual Report, 30 April 1917, Otago & Southland Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers (O&S SIUE) Minute

Appeal Boards adopting the classification of industries drawn up by the National Efficiency Board whereby agriculture, sheep-raising, cattle-raising and dairying were classified as 'most essential industries'.

From this point, several runholders and many of their employees were able to successfully appeal their conscription as they were balloted. Roy Elliot of Elfin Bay successfully appealed his enlistment on grounds of public interest as a producer of wool and mutton and the fact that he had to manage two stations. As Robert McKinlay of Ben Lomond Station was the only son of four left managing the run, he was given an exemption until the property had been sold.<sup>97</sup> G.S. Edie of Glencoe Station was successful in having firstly two shepherds relieved from territorial duty, then his head shepherd's exemption and finally his son's enlistment delayed until the end of shearing operations.<sup>98</sup> At the head of the lake, the labour shortage had become so acute by 1917 that Jock Watherston, a permanent employee on Wyuna Station, was the only high country shepherd left in the region.<sup>99</sup> When Watherston was called up for service at the end of 1917 his employer J.E. O'Connell and the runholders of Elfin Bay, Rees Valley and Birchdale lodged a joint appeal. The four stations worked in together at mustering times, with Watherston working along in turn. Finding a replacement for Watherston was considered impractical as he 'would not know the country' and, due to the war, would most likely be middle aged when this type of high country needed 'young and able' men.

For runholders who volunteered or who were conscripted for service, making arrangements for the working or sale of their leasehold was their first priority. H.D. Were transferred his license over Cecil Peak in 1915 in order to go to the front. The buyers of Cecil Peak from Were, the Gillies family, also transferred when their son enlisted for military service in 1917. William and Thomas McKinlay of Ben Lomond enlisted in 1915, leaving their younger brother Robert to firstly manage the station and then attempt to sell it when he was called up in mid-1917.<sup>100</sup> Being unable to find a buyer did not prevent Henry Field Elliot of Routeburn Station heading to the front.

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Book, 1911-1941, New Zealand Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers, Otago & Southland Branch: Records (MS-1039/4), Hocken Library.

<sup>97</sup> *Lake County Press*, 2 August 1917, 5.

<sup>98</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 23 October 1917; *Lake County Press*, 24 May 1917, 4; 17 December 1917, 5.

<sup>99</sup> *Lake County Press*, 13 December 1917, 5.

<sup>100</sup> It took until the start of 1918 to conclude a sale.

Instead he sold off the majority of his stock and left his brother Roy to manage the property along with Elfin Bay.<sup>101</sup> Like many of their shepherds and musterers, several Wakatipu runholders were never to come back to their runs. Andrew Manson of The Branches and Mt Creighton was killed in France in 1917 and Walter Mackenzie of Walter Peak at Gallipoli in 1915. Also lost were William McKinlay of Ben Lomond Station and brothers Henry Field and Alexander Elliot of Elfin Bay and Routeburn Stations.

In the same year the hostilities of the First World War ceased the Wakatipu high country experienced its worst winter of the twentieth century thus far. Over July and August 1918 at least eight snowstorms, of varying intensity, struck the Wakatipu high country. It appears the southern Wakatipu runs were hit the hardest while those at the head of the lake were better off.<sup>102</sup> Losses of between one-third and half of the flock were common. Across Lake County, the sheep population was reduced by 33,000. Glencoe Station lost 3,000 sheep, Cainard 6,700 and Greenvale 3,500.<sup>103</sup> The heavier stocking of some runs over the course of the decade probably exacerbated losses and forced runholders to revise sheep numbers back to a more sustainable level. Only in the early 1930s would sheep numbers once again reach the levels seen between 1915 and 1918.

### **The Re-emergence of Rural Trade Unionism and the Formation of the Otago Sheepowners' Union**

From the beginning of pastoralism in New Zealand conflict between runholders and shearers was endemic. John Martin attributes this to the fact that shearers were the most skilled of the itinerant rural workers, and were in great demand by runholders for a short, but crucial time of the year. Shearing operations meanwhile 'brought together large numbers of workers under one roof in 'industrial' conditions, with a developed division of labour, standardised working hours, and repetitive production

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<sup>101</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 24 December 1917.

<sup>102</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 23 July 1918, 6 August 1918, 20 August 1918.

<sup>103</sup> Glencoe Employees 1915-1921, Runs F-G, Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers, HL; Ernest Denny to CCL, Southland, 19 June 1919; 378/98; PRL 413, Vol. 1, Cainard; MM & RM Matheson to CCL, Southland, 23 May 1921; 315/59; PRL 412, Greenvale.

line work'.<sup>104</sup> These conditions not only led to conflict in the sheds but also the development, at an early stage, of large and powerful shearers trade unions.

The 1870s saw the mildly successful battle to raise the shearing rate to £1 per 100 sheep and the first formal organisation of a shearers' union. Runholders were able to defeat the Union in 1876 by organising themselves and employing Australian shearers as strike breakers. Low wool prices and a surplus of labour during the 1880s lowered the shearing rates again to 15s, and in some cases 12s 6d, but it also led to renewed conflict in the sheds. This economic stringency meant efforts to organise shearers during the 1880s, stimulated externally from the Australian Shearers' Union, were largely unsuccessful. In 1884, shearers at a large Wakatipu shed struck for £1 but went back to work for 16s.<sup>105</sup> Runholders were faced with a resurgence of shearers unionism in the 1890s, through the New Zealand Workers' Union (NZWU), which also aimed to improve working conditions as well as rates of pay. For the first time this challenged the shearing agreements that had operated in sheds since the 1870s. Concern over conditions was coupled with a closer alignment with the Liberal Government. Yet as John Martin points out, greater political leverage, while successful, weakened the Union as an industrial force and the NZWU had all but died out by the end of the century.<sup>106</sup>

The arbitration system implemented by the Liberal Government encouraged and assisted rural trade unionism. The creation of the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers in 1903 was a reactionary move to counter the formation of the Otago Shearers' Union in the same year.<sup>107</sup> The first meeting of Otago sheepowners, held in June 1903, was an extremely influential gathering of runholders, stock and station companies, wool brokers and manufacturers. It included John Roberts, A.C. Begg, Robert Glendenning, Watson Shennan, and Patrick Patullo. Among its committee were Thomas Brydone, David Macfarlane, A.D. Bell, and

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<sup>104</sup> John Martin, *The Forgotten Worker: The Rural Wage Earner in Nineteenth Century New Zealand*, (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 169.

<sup>105</sup> *Otago Witness*, 19 January 1884.

<sup>106</sup> Martin, *The Forgotten Worker*, 193.

<sup>107</sup> Canterbury Shearer and Sheepowner Unions had formed in 1901.

Robert Campbell.<sup>108</sup> Membership of the Union was open to all sheepowners with more than 1,000 sheep. Subscriptions were modest with an entrance fee of 2/6 and an annual sub of 2/6 per 1000 sheep. Unfortunately membership records are patchy, but in its first two years Union members from the Wakatipu were confined to around half a dozen stations at the head of the Lake. Hugh Mackenzie was the first runholder from the Wakatipu to join and his sons, in particular John Mackenzie, would remain influential members within the Union until it amalgamated with other primary producers to form Federated Farmers in 1944. By 1908 nearly every Wakatipu runholder had joined the Sheepowners' Union.<sup>109</sup> This tendency towards collective action from the Wakatipu runholders was significant considering that, overall, the Sheepowners' Union consistently struggled to recruit members throughout its history, particularly among the smaller sheepowners of Otago and Southland.<sup>110</sup>

Predictably, the affairs of the Sheepowners' Union were, up till 1910, dominated by disputes over shearing awards and conditions. The 1903-4 Otago and Southland shearers' dispute initiated a cycle of Arbitration cases and awards, so that by 1910 the price of shearing by blades had been raised back to the symbolic amount of £1 per 100 sheep. In many ways the awards adopted the framework of the old shed agreements, but they also addressed many long-standing shearers' grievances. In principle, standardised agreements to limit conflict and ensure operations ran smoothly were desirable from both parties' points of view. Shearing was highly skilled work where speed and throughput were essential to get the shed 'cut out' within the shortest possible timeframe. Runholders had to ensure their wool clip was cut and shipped in time for sale, whilst shearers, under the piece-rate method of payment, aimed to shear as many sheep as possible before moving onto the next shed. What runholders soon took exception to under the Arbitration system, were the seemingly ever-increasing demands made by the Labour Unions when existing

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<sup>108</sup> First Meeting of Sheepowners, 4 June 1903, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1903-11, New Zealand Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers, Otago & Southland Branch: Records, (MS-1039/3), Hocken Library.

<sup>109</sup> Based on appended list of sheepowners subject to the 1908 Otago and Southland Musters Award, see: Department of Labour, *Awards, Recommendations, Agreements, etc. made under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, New Zealand for the year 1908*, (Wellington: Government Printer, 1909), 114-121.

<sup>110</sup> Likewise the New Zealand Farmers Union struggled with recruitment at all times to 1944. See Tom Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise: a comparative study of the origins and early phases of development of the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales and the New Zealand Farmers' Union circa 1880-1929', (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 1977).

awards expired and the Court's willingness to accede to them. When the 1909 Shearers' Award raised the rate from 16/8 to 18/- per 100, John Angus, the Otago Sheep-Owners' Union President, believed that 'we had reached something like a finality, but finality seems to have no place in the schemes of modern trade unionism'.<sup>111</sup> Even when the Sheep-Owners Union considered asking the Court of Arbitration to make no award and allow sheepowners to operate under freedom of contract, they knew that 'if every shearer became a law unto himself, pandemonium would reign'.<sup>112</sup>

While runholders could appreciate the advantages of regional or Dominion awards covering shearing operations, despite disagreeing with rates and conditions, they opposed moves by other classes of pastoral labour to secure their own awards. Runholders particularly resented any award that would take away their freedom of contract with their yearly men, such as shepherds. To this end, the Sheepowners' Union met with some success. The 1908 AGM noted with satisfaction that the 1907 Musterers Award excluded shepherds altogether, 'thus leaving sheep-owners and shepherds still a free hand in their engagements'.<sup>113</sup> The Musterers' and Packers' Award of 1920 also excluded married couples and permanent hands.<sup>114</sup> The Sheepowners' Federation strenuously opposed the creation of a Woolclassers' Award but also compromised by agreeing to implement the 1911 Cooks' and Shed Hands' Award.<sup>115</sup>

Of course the shearing awards did not stop disputes between shearers and runholders, although it is difficult to know how prevalent they were. The most public and disruptive in the Wakatipu occurred in the region's largest sheds, which often employed upwards of two-dozen blade shearers. In 1909 shearers at the Mt Nicholas shed, working at the base rate of 18s per 100, struck for an extra 2s per 100. The shearers were dismissed and work suspended until a new gang arrived.<sup>116</sup> Trouble

<sup>111</sup> O&S SIUE: Annual Report for 1910, O&S SIUE, Minute Book, 1903-11.

<sup>112</sup> O&S SIUE: Annual Report for Year Ending 31 May, 1911, O&S SIUE, Minute Book, 1911-14, 12.

<sup>113</sup> O&S SIUE: AGM, 4 June 1908', O&S SIUE, Minute Book, 1903-11.

<sup>114</sup> O&S SIUE: Annual Report for Year Ending 31 May, 1920 and Minutes of AGM', O&S SIUE, Minute Book, 1911-41.

<sup>115</sup> The Canterbury and Otago Sheepowners' Unions had earlier been successful in having the same dispute thrown out of Court. Rates of pay for shed hands were included in the Shearers' Awards from 1917 onwards.

<sup>116</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 21 December 1909.





**Fig. (2.6)**

Peter Hodge, shepherd on Mt Aurum, 1914.

Peter Hodge, a Highland Scot, was typical of the early shepherds on the high country runs surrounding Lake Wakatipu.

Photo: Miles Aspinall, Horn Collection  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

erupted in the Mt Nicholas shed again in 1913, when the whole stand was paid off for refusing to shear sheep they considered to be wet.<sup>117</sup> In this instance the Labour Department brought a case against the Mackenzies, who with their legal costs met halfway by the Sheep-Owners' Union, won the case.

## Conclusion

The first twenty years of the twentieth century saw an improvement in the fortunes of woolgrowers after two decades of economic depression. Fine wool prices began an upward trend from 1905 and were sustained through to the end of the first wool Commandeer in 1920. Prices never reached the heights of the mid to late 1920s, but nor were there large fluctuations that produced wide variability in farmer incomes. Sheep numbers across twenty-five Wakatipu runs increased by twenty-three per cent between 1900 and 1920, as runholders looked to raise carrying capacities and restock idle country.

On the other hand, the 1905 Land Commission illustrated that there was still little incentive or security for development in the high country. Changes in land tenure in 1907 and 1913 gave greater security to runholders but varying lease terms, anywhere from four to twenty-one years, continued to frustrate. Rental increases also limited what could be invested back into the property. These factors, along with capital constraints, still remained the biggest limitations to the improvement of the Wakatipu runs. Environmentally, the state of the Wakatipu high country is difficult to assess. Increased stocking loads undoubtedly had an impact until the 1918 winter brought numbers back down and readjusted runholders' stocking assessments. The 1905 Commission illustrated that rabbit control depended largely on the resources and resolve of the individual runholder and labour shortages during the war saw the pest's numbers increase. Burning, one can safely assume, was still a widespread and well-used tool in pasture management.

The high country underwent a social transition between 1900 and 1920. Improving economic conditions re-stimulated land dealing and many of the 'pioneer' settlers

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<sup>117</sup> *Lake County Press*, 16 January 1913, 4.

sold up. Some runs were transferred within families as a new generation of runholders emerged but this practice was atypical and many more runs in the Wakatipu were sold to outside buyers. Pastoral subdivision, such a salient feature of the high country during this period, was nearly non-existent in the Wakatipu. Stations in fact showed a tendency to increase in size as runholders purchased adjoining blocks and the Lands Department grouped together runs in order to try and make holdings more viable. As an occupation, runholding continued to attract a diverse range of people. Farming experience, if not on the high country, was nearly universal among purchasers. The shepherd-runholder still remained the characteristic pastoral tenant of the Wakatipu.

Firming prices also had a direct correlation with increasing wage demands. The re-emergence of the Shearers' Union under the framework of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act ushered in a new era of pastoral industrial relations. Runholders were forced to act collectively to counter the demands of shearers, musterers, shepherds, packers and cooks. Woolgrowers grew to appreciate the advantages of negotiating Award rates with shearers, but similar moves by other classes of labour, particularly permanent hands, were strongly, and successfully, resisted. Questions of labour became particularly pertinent during the First World War with much of the rural labour force, and some runholders, taken from the hills.



Mustering gang on Mt Aurum Station, 1910s.  
 Andrew Lambie, runholder (far left). George 'Tiger' Smith (far right) worked mainly on mid-Wakatipu runs - Coronet Peak, Mt Aurum, Ben Lomond and Closeburn, with a stint during W.W.1 as head shepherd on Walter Peak.



Fig. (2.7)

### Wool Washing on Mt Aurum Station

Photos: Miles Aspinall, Horn Collection  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

## CHAPTER THREE

### A State of Uncertainty: The 1920s

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#### The 1920 Southern Pastoral Lands Commission

The 1920s began with the hearings and reporting of the government sponsored Commission on Southern Pastoral Lands, set up to examine the use (or misuse) of the South Island High Country. The commission was, as Alex Wearing puts it, ‘a response to the widespread acceptance that existing systems of the land tenure had severe environmental and socio-economic failings’.<sup>1</sup> The eight commissioners included Robert Sadd, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago as its Chairman, runholder Dickson Jardine, a future owner of Kawarau Falls and Glencoe Stations, and the botanist Leonard Cockayne. The Commission was given eight orders of reference covering aspects of pastoral tenure, subdivision, pasturage, and irrigation. It was the most comprehensive stock-take of seventy years of pastoral farming in New Zealand, and its report would influence the path of high country farming for the next two decades.

Perhaps recognising its value and relevance, as compared to the 1905 Land Commission, the 1920 Pastoral Commission found runholders much more enthusiastic participants and more organised in their approach. The Wakatipu Sheepowners’ Union, established in 1919, resolved to invite the Commission to Queenstown to hear evidence. Nearly a dozen members, including the president and vice-presidents, agreed or were requested in writing to provide evidence at the hearing.<sup>2</sup> The twin issues of ‘security of tenure’ and ‘compensation for improvements’ were familiar catch-cries although they were much less prominent than in 1905. The Wakatipu runholders appeared generally satisfied with the current maximum twenty-one year lease and right of renewal. Few complaints were made regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Wearing, ‘Plants, People and Landscapes’, 239.

<sup>2</sup> Fifth Meeting of Wakatipu Sheep Owners’ Union (WSOU), 6 January 1920, Wakatipu Sheep Owners Union Minute Book, (Misc-MS-0278), Hocken Library, 10.

compensation for improvements. Once again subdivision was ruled out by witnesses owing chiefly to the lack of winter country in the district. The rabbit question was also noticeably minor among witnesses and this fact was acknowledged in the report.<sup>3</sup> It appears, by 1920, that most runholders had rabbit numbers back under control after labour shortages during the war allowed them to multiply. James Burnett claimed his country was now practically clear of rabbits and ‘natural enemies’ - stoats and weasels - kept them down.<sup>4</sup> Similarly John Mackenzie of Walter Peak stated they had not laid poison for fifteen years, having controlled rabbit numbers on their runs by the early years of the twentieth century and now relied on the natural enemies.<sup>5</sup>

Several of the Commission’s recommendations regarding pastoral tenure were given effect to in the Land Laws Amendment Acts of 1921 and 1922 and the Land Act of 1924. The 1921-22 Land Laws Amendment Act raised the maximum term of pastoral licenses to thirty-five years and provided for a fourteen year extension to existing fourteen year leases.<sup>6</sup> Runholders also gained the right to directly freehold sufficient land to maintain one settler and his family. In order to discourage leasehold speculation and improve the condition of the pastoral country, stipulation was made that improvements, to the value of four years rent, had to be made within six years of the start of the lease. The 1924 Land Act mainly consolidated these various amendments rather than introducing any major changes to pastoral tenure. Section 277 of the 1924 Land Act, however, enabling a licensee to surrender and obtain a new license at a revised rental, would be utilised frequently by runholders during the 1930s.

The second major task of the Commission was to investigate and report on the causes of deterioration or depletion of grasslands and how they might be restored. Several Wakatipu runholders considered injudicious burning as the main cause of pasture deterioration.<sup>7</sup> This opinion however was probably more in hindsight, as by 1920 most leaseholders in the Wakatipu appeared to have already subscribed, at least

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Southern Pastoral Lands: Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into and Report Upon’, *AJHR*, C-15, 1920, 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 20 April 1920.

<sup>5</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 27 April 1920.

<sup>6</sup> 1921-1922 Land Laws Amendment Act, *The Statutes of New Zealand 1921-22*, (Wellington: Government Printer, 1922), 576.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*; *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 20 April 1920.

publicly, to the principles of judicious burning, as were ultimately propounded in the Commission's report. This included burning within the right season, on dark faces only, and only when the tussock had become choked out by dead leaves and vegetation. Several also advocated 'safety burning' on high-risk areas, adjacent to railway lines for instance, to prevent accidental fires sweeping their runs. Five such fires broke out on Glencoe Station during the 1920s.<sup>8</sup> The most severe, started by two miners in January 1925, burnt over 4,000 acres of winter country and took fifty men and two days to extinguish.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless in 1920, the restricted firing of tussock lands was still an integral part of pasture and run management for many pastoralists. W.S. Reid of The Branches and Leo Lee of Ben Lomond only burnt on dark faces and J.W. Adams of Earnslaw approved of burning provided it was in the right season. James Burnett thought it was beneficial to burn snow grass and tussock, but only between July and September when the tussock roots were wet. G.S. Edie of Glencoe burnt only on dark faces, but also stated he 'would burn snow grass every time'.<sup>10</sup> John Mackenzie probably represented the further end of the spectrum, stating he did not believe in burning tussock at all and although fern and spear grass was cleared through fire, it was many years since they had any fires on their runs.

Most runholders could also offer an opinion on how deteriorated land might be restored. Surface sowing with mixtures of cocksfoot, crested dogstail and clover, the spelling of land through internal subdivision and light stocking loads, were generally considered the best method of restoring deteriorated country. There did not appear to be any 'popular and unaccountable prejudice against pasture improvement' on the part of Wakatipu runholders as the 1910 Commission on the Mackenzie Country runs discovered. James Burnett and R.M. Paterson had sowed between fifty and sixty acres of grass each in recent months and had been pleased with the results. Again capital

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<sup>8</sup> *Lake County Press*, 10 February 1921, 4; 22 November 1922, 2; 29 January 1925, 3; Dickson Jardine Farm Diary, 16 November 1927, Dickson Jardine Farm Diaries (AG-659), Hocken Library; *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 8 October 1929.

<sup>9</sup> Dickson Jardine Farm Diary, 22, 23 and 24 January 1925.

<sup>10</sup> Given that the burning of snow-grass on Crown land had been prohibited since 1913, it seems odd that runholders would admit to burning it. On the other hand, as Leonard Cockayne discovered as a member of the Pastoral Lands Commission, sheep farmers were often poor botanists. The broad term 'snow-grass' could include snow-grass or tussock (*Danthonia flavescens*) but also include the red tussock (*Danthonia raouili*) – Southern Pastoral Lands: Report, *AJHR*, C-15, 1920, 13.



constraints were more likely to prevent any large areas of surface sowing to be implemented. As Leo Lee of Ben Lomond Station pointed out, re-grassing his run would take all fourteen years of his lease, and would provide them with very little return in that time. Perhaps the best example of what might be achieved with regards to pasture improvement was once again on Walter Peak Station. Here, in what John Mackenzie called 'systematic nursing' over a number of years, extensive areas were surface sown, a large campaign was mounted against rabbits, over 100 miles of internal and boundary fencing was erected, the high summer country was spelled for four or five months each year, and a variety of fodder crops were cultivated on hundreds of acres of freehold land.

In their final report, the Commission was 'strongly of the opinion, as far as evidence and experience go, that burning tussock is desirable'. Of course this was tempered by an absolute opposition to indiscriminate burning. Three circumstances were given under which judicious burning should take place and seven circumstances where burning should not occur.<sup>11</sup> This set of guidelines would remain the orthodoxy for pastoral burning for several decades. The means of restoring pastoral lands according to the Commissioners, were not dissimilar to those recommended by witnesses, including those from the Wakatipu. In assessing the Commission's report, Kevin O'Connor, argues that Cockayne and the Pastoral Commission seriously underestimated the extent of rangeland deterioration and the reduction in the carrying capacity of the tussock lands.<sup>12</sup> This failure meant it would be another two decades before the full extent of rangeland deterioration was appreciated.

A major aspect of the 1921-22 Land Laws Amendment Act was the prohibition of all tussock burning without Land Board approval. Now for the first time, through official records, it was possible to gain a picture of how often runholders lit tussock fires on their runs (provided of course they applied to do so). From 1923 to 1930, the Southland Land Board sanctioned thirteen tussock fires across seven Wakatipu runs. Three fires, on Lorne Peak and Greenvale, were 'safety burns' alongside railway track. Burning on Lorne Peak in 1923 was carried out on tussock flattened by snow

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<sup>11</sup> Southern Pastoral Lands: Report, 20.

<sup>12</sup> K.F. O'Connor, 'The influence of science on the use of tussock grasslands', *Review, Journal of the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute*, no. 43, (1986), 39.



and in 1925 on 'rank red tussock and snow tussock'. In only two cases did runholders state their intention to surface sow or cultivate the ground for winter crops.<sup>13</sup> From the ten pastoral run files examined in the Otago District, three requests to burn tussock were lodged between 1923 and 1930, one on Ben Lomond on 'such parts considered necessary to promote growth', and the other two on Coronet Peak Station in 1928 and 1929. Whereas in Southland runholders normally had to indicate the areas intended to be burnt, there seemed to be no such requirement from the Otago Board other than a recommendation of approval from the district field inspector. The limited use of fire during the 1920s should perhaps come as no surprise. R.S Galbraith, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago noted in 1928 that in Central Otago, 'the indiscriminate use of the fire-stick appears to have ended' with the 'burning of tussock...now being carried out in a proper manner at the proper season'.<sup>14</sup> Among the Wakatipu runholders there is certainly no indication of fire being used on an annual basis as a matter of standard management practice. Rather it was used on a requisite basis for specific purposes.

### **The Economics of Runholding in the 1920s**

Changes to pastoral tenure, as outlined above, and the way in which runholders responded to them were to a degree dictated by the unstable economic conditions of the 1920s. World War One had brought in a measure of stability to wool prices, but when the wool commandeered ended in June 1920 the following season's prices fell dramatically. Many runholders took an overly pessimistic view of the 1921 slump and it is easy to understand why. In 1920 the wool returns from W.S. Reid's The Branches Station totalled £1,431, from 65 bales with a top price of 18d per lb. In 1921, 71 bales of Branches wool brought a net return of just £325, with a top price of 9d per lb.<sup>15</sup> Farmers' agents took the brunt of the rural discontent. One such agent, the National Mortgage and Agency Company (N.M.A.), was inundated with clients and their unpaid bills.<sup>16</sup> With the Company itself short of money, branch managers 'did not

<sup>13</sup> McDonald to CCL, Southland, 8 September 1923; 413/130; PRL 413 Vol. 1, Cainard; Annie Shaw to CCL, Southland, 5 August 1928; 296/75; PRL 466 Elfin Bay.

<sup>14</sup> 'Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, 1928', *AJHR*, C-1, 1928, 18.

<sup>15</sup> W.S. Reid – Wool Sales, 4 March 1920; W.S. Reid – Wool Sales, 16 March 1921; "Donald Reid Correspondence - The Branches 1916-21," Box 2, Donald Reid & Co Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>16</sup> Parry, *N.M.A. The Story of the First 100 Years*, 152.

want to lose clients but even more than that, they were loath to lose the Company's money'.<sup>17</sup> Instead, interest on some pastoral current accounts with the N.M.A was reduced to seven per cent. This, G.R. Ritchie, the general manager hoped, 'should show clients that we are endeavouring to help them as much as possible during the present time, and they must not grumble if we hold them with a tight reign until at all events their accounts get into a more satisfactory position.'<sup>18</sup> Ritchie knew prices would soon rise and rise they did. At the 1922 sale, top prices for Wakatipu Merino and half-bred wool reached between 16d and 17d per lb.<sup>19</sup> By 1925, Rees Valley's top wool was reaching over 30d per lb and The Branches was nearly as high, although figures showed a considerable decrease the following year, resulting in many Lake County clips not reaching the vendors' reserves.<sup>20</sup> Prices had again strengthened by the late 1920s, indeed reaching record heights in some cases, before freefalling in 1930.

The high price of fine wool over the latter half of the decade and some favourable seasons (1928 excluded) once again encouraged an increase in stock numbers. From 155,311 in 1921, sheep numbers on the Wakatipu high country remained fairly static over the first half of the 1920s before climbing to 163,593 in 1929. High wool prices also encouraged the greater use of dry sheep. Between 1920 and 1930 the percentage of wethers and dry ewes, relative to breeding ewes, in Lake County rose markedly from 81.8 per cent to 95.4 per cent. Likewise, of the total ram numbers in Lake County, the percentage of fine-wooled Merino rams, increased from 37.3 per cent to 51.1 per cent, while half-bred rams declined from 14.7 per cent to 4 per cent.<sup>21</sup> Therefore while fine wool prices were high runholders aimed to maximise returns and wool yields by utilising the finer Merino rams, and by carrying a greater proportion of dry sheep, employ more of their high summer grazing country.

The major check on sheep numbers during the 1920s came in 1923 when a prolonged and severe series of snowstorms hit the Wakatipu Basin. Runholders had barely

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>18</sup> General Manager to Dunedin Branch, 6 October 1921; "NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1918-24 V. 1," Box 66, N.M.A Co. Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>19</sup> *Lake County Press*, 2 February 1922.

<sup>20</sup> *Lake County Press*, 29 January 1925, 3.; 4 February 1926, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Statistical Review of the Sheep Farming Industry of New Zealand, Volume II*, (Wellington: Rural Development Division, Department of Agriculture, 1947), 278-279.

recovered their losses from the 1918 winter when on 23 June 1923, the shortest day of the year, snow fell and continued periodically till early July. Severe frosts followed before more snow fell in late July and then again in mid-August. Snow lay on the higher ground well into September. Newspaper reports generally overstated the losses on the high country and most runholders experienced above normal but not excessive losses (An approximate estimate of losses would be 10,000 sheep across the Wakatipu compared with over 30,000 in 1918). Therefore unlike after the 1918 winter when considerable sums were spent in replacing stock, the greater impact in 1923 was on lambing, which was considerably lower, and a lighter wool clip for the 1923-24 season.<sup>22</sup> There were some stories of bad luck, such as on Cainard where the blizzard struck as 2,500 ewes were being driven over the tops to the Long Burn. Despite the efforts of the shepherds, the whole flock had to be left in a basin, where they smothered and none survived.<sup>23</sup>

Several hard winters over the previous two decades had taught runholders how best to cope. After many sheep had been lost in slips during the 1918 winter, James Burnett of Halfway Bay kept sheep hunted down off these areas in subsequent winters.<sup>24</sup> Immediately following the winter of 1918, the Mackenzies of Walter Peak made provision for the feeding of all hoggets and weaker sheep by purchasing two tractors and cultivating extra land for winter-feed. They spent £1400 in the process but estimated to have saved 6,000-7,000 sheep during the 1923 winter.<sup>25</sup> Runholders were also philosophical about the strike of heavy snow. Local farmer James King, told the *Lake County Press*, that irrespective of the warning runholders get, 'short of taking the sheep off the runs, the owners can do no more than they have been doing in past years'. When heavy snow fell on winter country there was nowhere else to put sheep nor was it possible to send them away or get feed to them if the run was any distance from a railway line. As King said, 'the runholders are not careless in these matters. They know their business and recognise the danger, and put the sheep where there is less risk'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Lake County Press*, 26 July 1923, 2; 2 August 1923, 2; 13 September 1923; G.L. Burdon, *Tall Hills and Tight Lines*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Replacement ewes cost around £2 per head - Cainard Information in 'Runs CA-CL', Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers.

<sup>24</sup> James Burnett to CCL, Southland, 19 July 1935; 403/117; PRL 403 Halfway Bay.

<sup>25</sup> H Mackenzie & Sons to CCL, Southland, 3 August 1923; 420/23; PRL 522, Walter Peak.

<sup>26</sup> *Lake County Press*, 13 September 1923, 3.



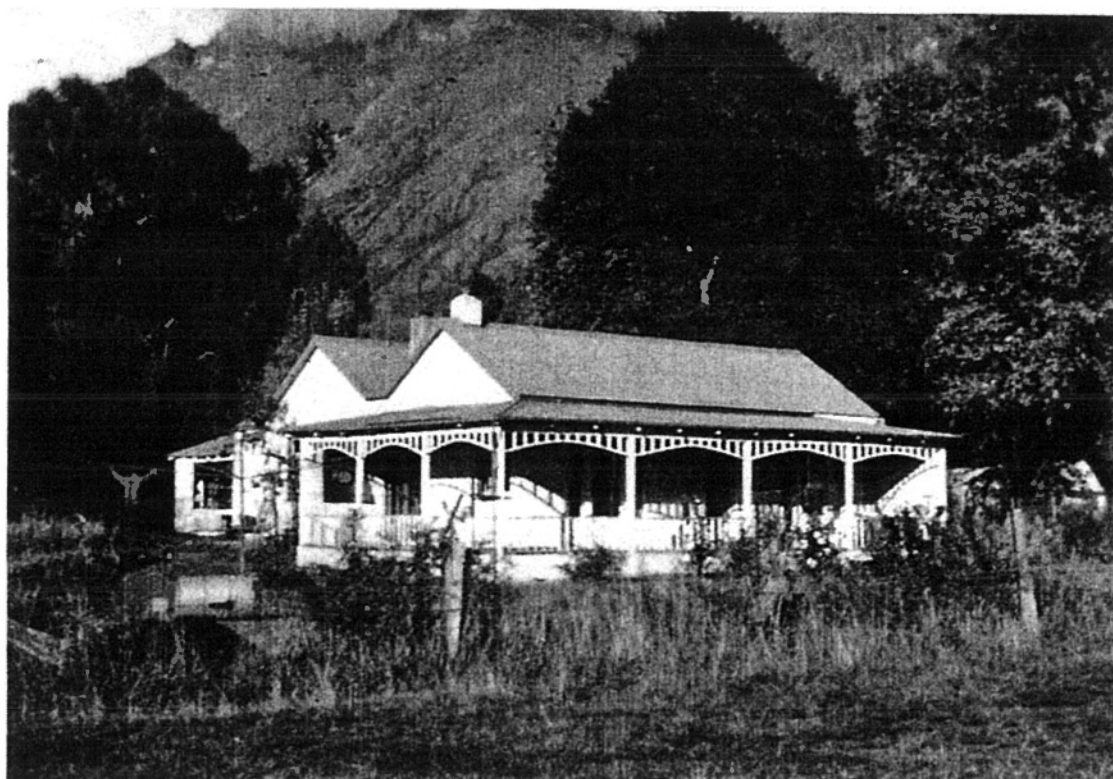
Snow Raking on Cainard, 1923.



Fig. (3.1)

Shearing Gang on Cainard, 1920s.  
Jack McDonald, manager for Denny and Swift at far left.

Originals: A McDonald  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library



Homestead at Halfway Bay, 1947.



Fig. (3.2)

Looking towards Halfway Bay Homestead under snow, 1923.

Originals: J Burnett, Jnr.  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



The Lochy Valley and Halfway Bay under snow, 1923.

Original: J Burnett jnr  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

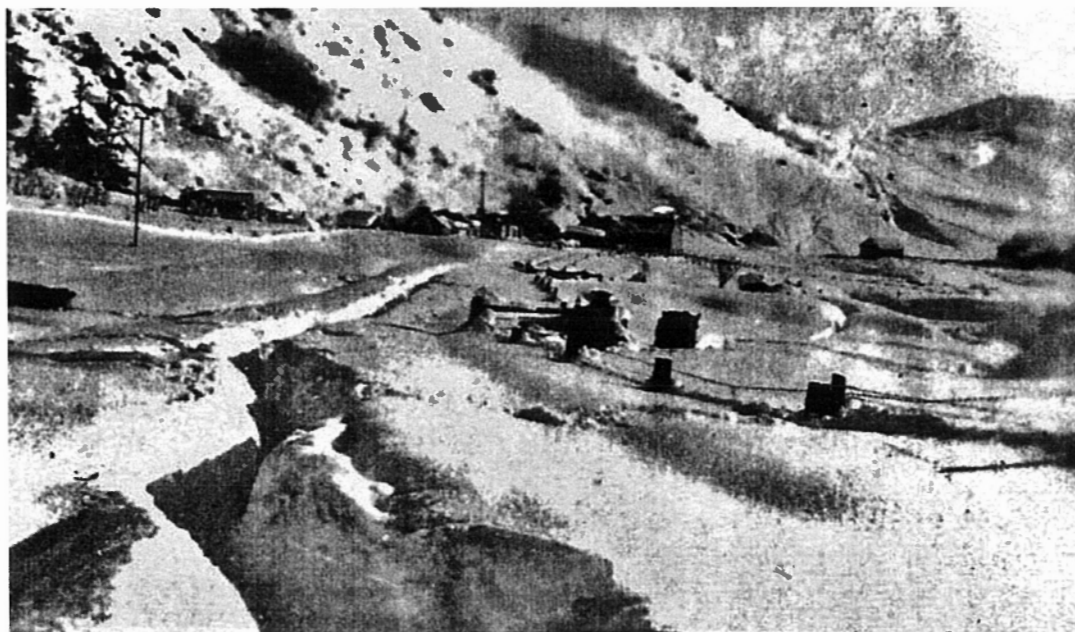


Fig. (3.3)

Glencoe Station under snow, 1923.

Original: Mrs J Hansen  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



Provisions for the extension of existing pastoral licenses or alternatively their surrender and renewal for a term not exceeding thirty-five years was by far the most popular change to pastoral tenure in the 1920s. Influenced by the slump in prices in the early 1920s, the lasting effects of the 1918 snowfall and the immediate impact of the 1923 winter, and a general desire for a more secure tenure, many runholders in the Wakatipu made use of the new changes in pastoral tenure legislation. On Cecil Peak, Leo Acland applied for and was granted an extension on the grounds of some poor recent seasons. Acland's agents, Dalgety and Co., supported his application pointing out that their client had 'made considerable efforts to improve the country by lighter stocking and keeping rabbits down to zero'.<sup>27</sup>

Extensions and renewals were not only used as a semi-defensive measure to rally and consolidate the position of runholders after hardship. Improving wool prices and favourable seasons over the later half of the 1920s reinstated some confidence in the high country and encouraged some runholders to effect improvement on their properties. Extensions and renewals of pastoral licenses provided extra security. The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland reported in 1927 that:

The pastoralists on the high country have had a good year, and it is noticeable that more attention being given to improving the class of sheep. The extended term of the license now offered has given more inducement in this direction, and also to improving the carrying-capacity by surface sowing.<sup>28</sup>

The Adams of Mt Earnslaw, for instance, were granted a fourteen-year extension before bringing in a tractor and truck in an effort to clear matagouri and bring more land into production for winter feed.<sup>29</sup> The thirty-five year license appealed to those intending to effect major improvements. The Mathesons of Greenvale Station requested a thirty-five year lease, as many improvements were needed on the run, including subdividing fences, buildings, and drainage. As the Mathesons put it, 'the cost of this will be more than we will get out of the place for some considerable time

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<sup>27</sup> Dalgety and Co to CCL, Southland, 5 June 1922; 387; PRL 387 Cecil Peak.

<sup>28</sup> Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland, 1927; *AJHR*, C-1, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Chandler, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, 48.

and we would like to have these improvements protected by a longer lease'.<sup>30</sup> Just to the north of Greenvale, the McCaughans of Glen Nevis Station applied for and were granted a fresh license for thirty-five years as they intended to clear the run of fern and surface sow.<sup>31</sup>

License extensions were more popular than renewals because they were granted at existing rentals, provided the Crown considered it to be adequate. The lessees of Mt Creighton were offered a renewal rather than an extension as the existing rent was considered to be too low. William Paterson of Mount Aurum Station also had his application for a license extension and then renewal declined on the grounds that Crown considered the present rental of £75 per annum to be insufficient. Instead it was decided to let the license run its term after which it could be renewed 'at the best possible rent obtainable'.<sup>32</sup> The above case supported the view by many farmers that the Crown looked upon pastoral leaseholds as a source of revenue and this raised the danger of rentals becoming arbitrary figures without proper consideration of the geography of the run or its economic potential.

Continuing inconsistency and indecision was also shown over Coronet Peak Station where the threat of subdivision had hung over this large run since 1905. In 1924, the leaseholders were granted only a seven year extension to their license, rather than the normal fourteen, as they were informed that the runs were most likely to be required for subdivision. Yet, other than some local residents protesting against any extension of the Coronet Peak lease, there was no evidence that the Lands Department were pressing for the run's subdivision.<sup>33</sup> In fact in 1929, on the request of the leaseholders and with two years of the extension to run, the Land Board offered a new thirty-five year license over Coronet Peak. Ironically it was the runholders themselves who performed some ill-advised subdivision on Coronet Peak. In 1924, shortly after taking possession, the McLean brothers sold off most of the run's freehold and a portion of the Coronet Peak leasehold, in total some 6,000 acres of winter country. This act was sanctioned by the Land Board but proved detrimental to the run's viability. Doug

<sup>30</sup> R.M. & M.M. Matheson to CCL, Southland, 12 April 1922; 315/73; PRL 412 Greenvale.

<sup>31</sup> NMA to CCL, Otago, 24 October 1922; Folio 86; PO 201 Vol. 1, Glen Nevis 1911-64; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>32</sup> The Undersecretary hoped for a rental of £125. It was renewed in 1930 for 35 years at £110 per annum; USL to CCL, Otago, 15 November 1923; PR 1853 Vol. 1, Mt Aurum 1901-1936; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>33</sup> Telegram from W.A. Bodkin to CCL, Otago, 19 February 1929; Folio 99; PR 1853 Vol. 1, Coronet Peak, 1910-31.



Rowe, a leaseholder of Coronet Peak during the 1940s, lamented the sale and could not explain why the block was sold or why the Land Board had allowed it:

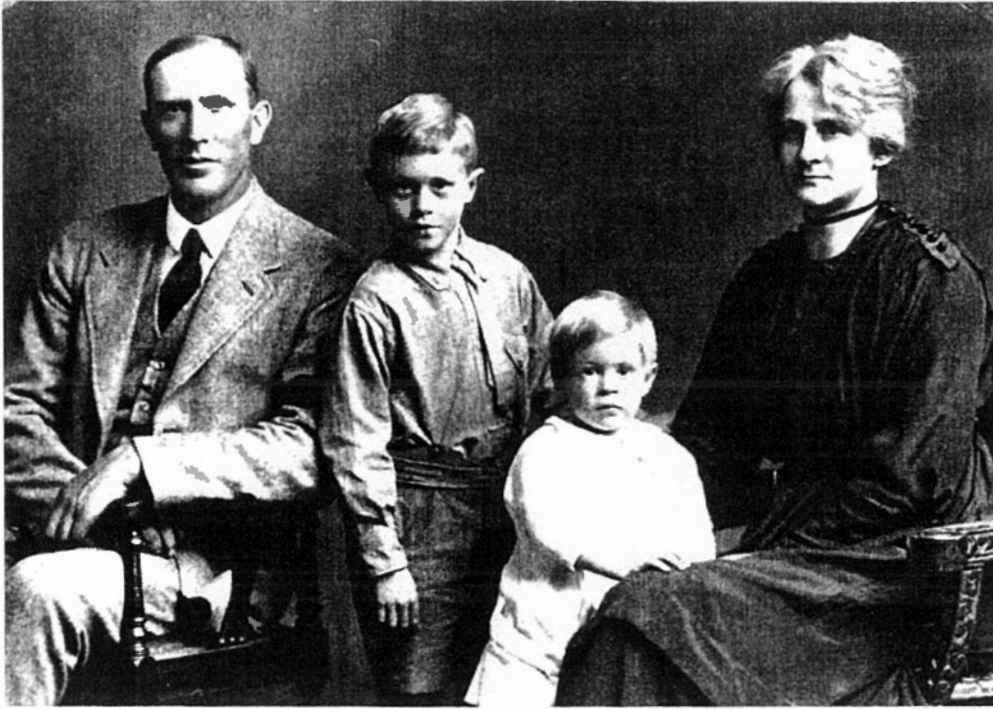
[The McLeans] bought the whole station and sold that [portion] practically immediately after they took over. Possibly they were not conversant with conditions. Possibly they misjudged it, and thought it could be done without. They might have thought they could handle the rest of the run more cheaply without it, and that they would get equally good returns. But as it turned out they didn't.<sup>34</sup>

Fluctuating prices over the decade and severe winters in 1923 and 1928 made for sometimes prosperous but also uncertain times for runholders and their lenders. The N.M.A. Company held the business of a number of stations at the head of the lake, including Birchdale, Elfin Bay, Mt Earnslaw, Wyuna and Routeburn. Under the general management of the cautious but astute G.R. Ritchie, debt levels of the N.M.A.'s pastoral clients during the 1920s were tightly controlled. Advances and current account balances were monitored through half-yearly reports and adequate security for such advances was normally a prerequisite. The 1920s were generally characterised by what Simon Ville calls 'cyclical medium-term finance', whereby sales revenue, mainly wool, was generally insufficient to cover the farmers' expenses.<sup>35</sup> Periods of high wool prices and heavy clips would bring the accounts down, while poor prices and stock losses in bad winters increased indebtedness. Carrying a certain amount of debt from year to year was the norm and was generally tolerated according to the Company's estimation of their client and their future prospects. William Elliot, who took up Birchdale Station in 1920 was considered a 'good doer' by the Dunedin Branch and expected to succeed.<sup>36</sup> Initial advances were made to stock up the property with Merinos, taking Elliot's overdraft to £2,880 by September 1921. Even though Elliot gradually reduced his debt over the decade and his account was considered undoubted, Ritchie still thought Elliot, along with other runholders, 'may be disposed to be a little too much inclined to get into debt' and

<sup>34</sup> 'Doug Rowe - Evidence', HJ Wardell: Papers relating particularly to the Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, Evidence of the High Country Committee, Volume 10, (MS-1755/005), Hocken Library, 12Z.1.

<sup>35</sup> Ville, *The Rural Entrepreneurs*, 74-75.

<sup>36</sup> Dunedin Branch Manager's Report, 31/9/1920; NMA Inspectors Reports - Dunedin 1917-42, N.M.A. Records, (UN-028), Hocken Library.



Dickson Jardine and Family, Glencoe and Kawarau Falls.



Fig. (3.4)

Glencoe and Kawarau Falls shepherds and musterers, 1926 - Dickson Jardine, runholder (front and centre); Douglas Rowe, head shepherd and owner of Coronet Peak Station, 1940-47 (front row, second from left)

Originals: D.G. Jardine  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

would therefore need to be watched closely.<sup>37</sup> On Wyuna Station, the Company regarded ownership and management arrangements as less than ideal and struggled to keep the station's account within certain limits.

The N.M.A was perhaps among the most cautious of the stock agencies in a period of renewed land speculation, particularly at the beginning and end of the 1920s. Some hoped that the price slump in the early 1920s might have taught farmers and mercantile agents some lessons – the former to live within their means and the latter to be more careful in accepting risky business.<sup>38</sup> Yet with buoyant prices driving up land and stock values, several runs were sold at a substantial consideration with the bulk of the purchase money being placed on mortgage. As will be seen later, some runholders, under the burden of heavy mortgage liabilities, ran into considerable difficulties during the depression of the 1930s. Within Otago, the Commissioner of Crown Lands noted in 1927 that 'for purely pastoral properties, on which little or no cultivation is done, the ruling prices for goodwill of the leases are still very high', and that 'a few [transfers] were refused owing to the excessive amount of consideration money or to the obvious unfitness of the proposed transferee to shoulder the financial burden involved'.<sup>39</sup> After the 1923 winter Edward Blakely the leaseholder of Lorne Peak Station appeared before the Southland Land Board to plead for a renewal of his license. Blakely had only been in possession for a few months before the heavy snowfalls and estimated, perhaps somewhat pessimistically, to have lost between 3,000 and 4,000 sheep out of a flock of 9,000. He now admitted that he paid too much for the run and that under the current circumstances he could no longer get finance.<sup>40</sup> The Land Board had little sympathy, and considered that because of the large good will paid for the station it 'was a gamble and will continue to be a gamble'.<sup>41</sup>

Despite some excessive prices, pastoral settlement on the Wakatipu high country became more settled over the 1920s. Between 1921 and 1929 there were fourteen

<sup>37</sup> G.R. Ritchie to Dunedin Branch, 30 September 1925; NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1924-27, V. 2, Box 66, N.M.A Records, (UN-028), Hocken Library.

<sup>38</sup> Director's Report - Donald Reid and Co. Annual General Meeting, 27 April 1922, Donald Reid and Co, Minute Book 1900-1934, (00-121/01), Reid Farmers Ltd: Further Records, Hocken Library, 147-148.

<sup>39</sup> Extract of the Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, 1927, *AJHR*, C-1, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Land Board Meeting, 20 September 1923; 316; PRL 316 Lorne Peak.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Blakely was granted a three year extension to his license before the run was subdivided in 1926.

transfers of runs. Once again the majority of purchasers were experienced high country men. The other conspicuous feature of the sales was that several of the transferees were only young men. William Mathias Elliot was twenty-one, and a former student at Lincoln College, when he took up the isolated Birchdale run in 1920; George Lyon Burdon was twenty-two when he bought Mt Creighton Station in 1922; Frank Johnson who bought Ben Lomond in 1924 in partnership with his brother, was twenty-three; and Archibald Alexander McCaughan was also twenty-three when he took over Loch Linnhe in 1921. On the other hand runholding, particularly in mountainous country, was a young man's vocation and youth was an advantage rather than a drawback on such runs. A Crown Ranger, commenting on William Elliot taking over Birchdale Station, said 'a young man who is contented to live a lonely life and take on hard work should do well here, but country of this description requires good and constant attention'.<sup>42</sup> Fitness and endurance was required no more so than during hard winters when snow raking to save trapped sheep. G.L. Burdon recalls spending twelve days in succession snow raking, four of them by himself, on Mt Creighton Station during the 1923 winter.<sup>43</sup>

Snow and the post-war depression exacerbated problems on several runs. On Kawarau Falls Station, these factors forced the runholder, J.A.P McBride into the clutches of the N.M.A. Large advances to restock following snow losses had blown out McBride's current account debt to £13,921 in 1920.<sup>44</sup> Although the company had sufficient equity to cover its advances, doubts were raised if McBride was the man to pull the station thorough.<sup>45</sup> From 1920 the N.M.A effectively exercised control over Kawarau Falls. Inspections were made at six-monthly intervals, interest was taken into reserve and Ritchie wanted a manager appointed 'in whom we have implicit confidence'. By early 1922, and seeing no improvement in the situation, McBride was asked to vacate the homestead in preparation for the sale of the run. Ritchie extended his sympathy but told McBride, 'I have already more than once in the past indicated to you that this was a contingency which might have to be faced, and I am very sorry

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<sup>42</sup> Crown Ranger Leonard's Report on Run 417, 17 February 1920; PR 1882 Vol. 1, Birchdale 1896-1945; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>43</sup> Burdon, *Tall Hills and Tight Lines*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Dunedin Branch Manager's Report, 31/9/20; NMA Inspectors Reports - Dunedin 1917-42.

<sup>45</sup> Even without taking into account the outlay for purchases of replacement stock, the Company estimated the loss on the station in 1919 was over £1,000; Ibid.

that it is necessary to have to take this step, but I would only add that we are doing so in the interests of all concerned'.<sup>46</sup>

Kawarau Falls was not the only run where affairs turned critical during the 1920s. Greenvale Station's current account balance with Donald Reid and Co went from a credit of £815 in 1915 to a debit of £14,574 by 1930. All of the £11,000 paid in cash by R.E. Matheson on purchase in 1915 had been lost and Donald Reid, owed around two years interest, was forced to write off another £2,931 as a bad debt.<sup>47</sup> By 1930, Mrs Matheson and her son had effectively abandoned the property, forcing the late R.E. Matheson's brothers, both elderly men, into taking over the property to protect their mortgage. Similar problems were experienced on the neighbouring Cainard run. Wool brokers Ernest Denny and John Swift bailed out of Cainard Station in 1928, selling to Henry Adams of Mt Earnslaw Station for £15,250, some £4,000 less than Denny and Swift paid for the run as a going concern in 1918.<sup>48</sup> It was claimed that while owning Cainard, Denny and Swift never made 'a penny profit out of it', showing a loss of £19,000 in the books, which when added to the deficiency on sale, made a total loss of £23,000.<sup>49</sup> These last two stations, Greenvale and Cainard were also the scene of an aborted subdivision and then substantial rental increases in the early 1920s.

### **Pastoral Subdivision in the South Wakatipu High Country**

As outlined in the previous chapter, pastoral subdivision was an important feature of the history of New Zealand's high country during the late nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century. Many high country pastoral subdivisions before 1920 were of limited success. Kevin O'Connor noted that in the Mackenzie Country several subdivisions made in the first two decades of the twentieth century had

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<sup>46</sup> G.R Ritchie to J.P. McBride, 3 March 1922; NMA GM (Colonial) - Outwards, V. 1, 1921-24, Box 25, N.M.A. Records (UN-028), Hocken Library. In 1922, Dickson Jardine, owner of Glencoe Station on the Crown Range and member of the 1920 Pastoral Commission, became owner of Kawarau Falls with J.P. McBride in co-management.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Reid & Co to CCL, Southland, 23 May 1932; 412/184; PRL 412 Greenvale.

<sup>48</sup> N.M.A. to CCL, Southland, 12 July 1928; 413/158; PRL 413 Vol. 1, Cainard.

<sup>49</sup> J.W. Swift & Co to CCL, 10 May 1932; 413/328; Ibid.

coalesced within a decade.<sup>50</sup> The cases of Greenvale, Cainard and Lorne Peak at the southern end of Lake Wakatipu offer an insight into the actual bureaucratic process of pastoral subdivision. In the case of Greenvale and Cainard an almost certainly ill advised subdivision was averted. Lorne Peak on the other hand saw, over a period of five years, the determination of the Southland Land Board to break the run up despite leaseholder misgivings, the destructive 1923 snow and mounting disagreement within the Land Board itself over the subdivisions.

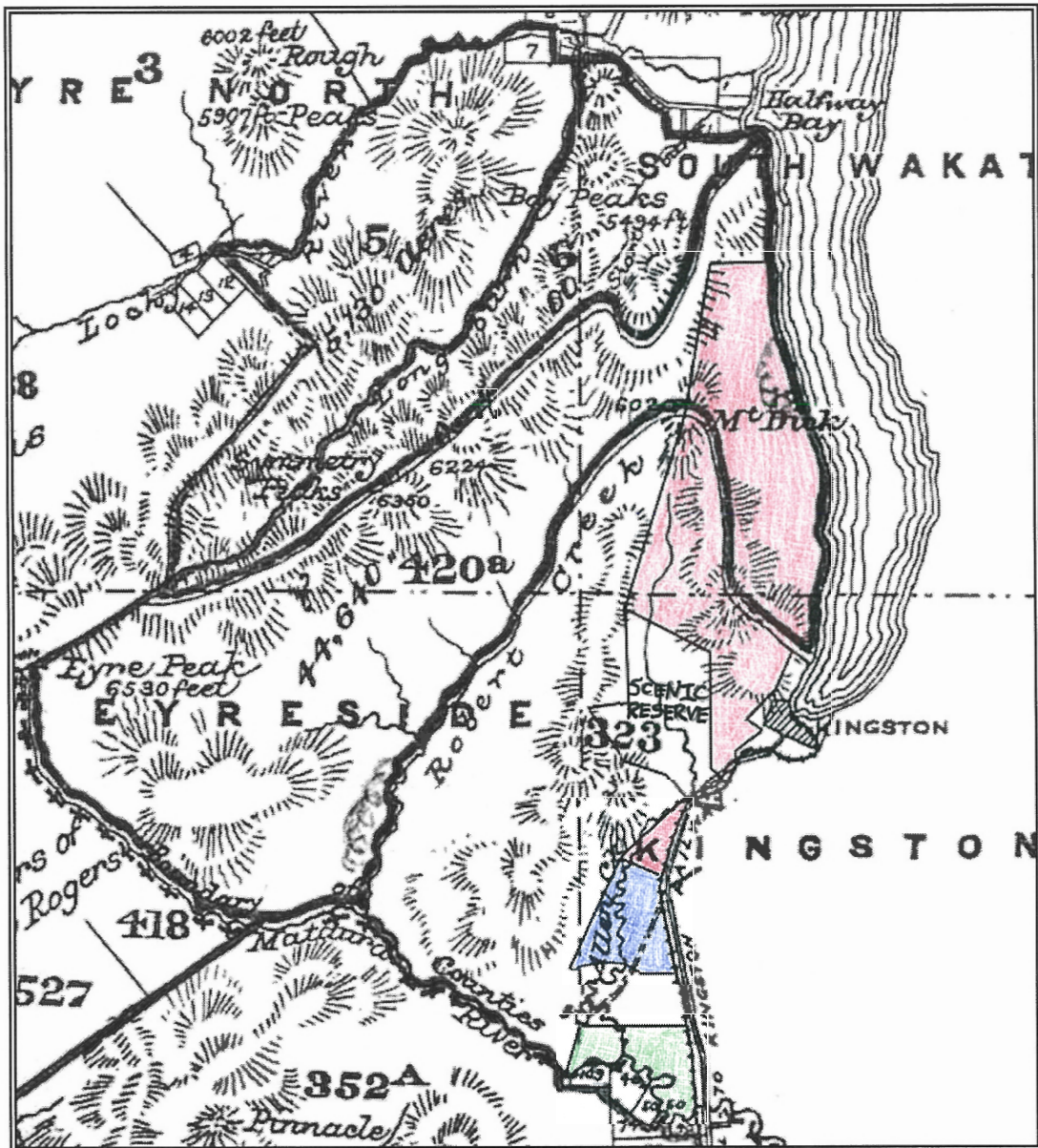
The leases of four southern Wakatipu runs, Halfway Bay, Cainard, Greenvale and Lorne Peak all fell due in 1922. In May 1921, the runholders of Lorne Peak, Greenvale and Cainard were informed of the Classification Commission's decision to subdivide their runs. On Cainard, the Lake Face block was to be detached and joined to the northeast portion of Greenvale to form a new pastoral run. Further flat land was to be taken from Greenvale for closer settlement and public purposes (map 3.1). Lorne Peak was to be divided into three blocks. The reason for the Southland Land Board's decision to subdivide the southern Wakatipu runs in 1921, when the same runs had been deemed unsuitable for closer settlement in 1901 and again in 1912, is unclear. Most likely the Land Board was under mounting public pressure to provide land for prospective farmers and returned service men. The subdivision of Lorne Peak would create two new pastoral runs, while the division of Cainard and Greenvale would create a new run and several new farms.

What was remarkable was the lack of consultation with the leaseholders themselves regarding subdivision. All the affected leaseholders expressed initial surprise and then grave concerns with the proposals, particularly from the point of view of future run management and economic viability. Ken McLeod of Lorne Peak feared that the middle subdivision of Lorne Peak, which was also the homestead block, would be greatly denuded of winter country. In light of the recent 1918 snow losses, McLeod asked the Land Board to 'reconsider making a separate run of the southern portion as it contains some fine winter country'.<sup>51</sup> Similar concerns were more acute on Cainard, where the absentee owners, wool brokers Ernest Denny and John Swift, expressed

<sup>50</sup> K.F. O'Connor, 'Evolution of a New Zealand high country pastoral community', in D.C. Pitt (ed.), *Society and Environment – The Crisis in the Mountains, Working Papers in Comparative Sociology No. 8*, (Auckland: University of Auckland, 1978), 187-224.

<sup>51</sup> Ken McLeod to CCL, Southland, 24 May 1921; Folio 316; PRL 316 Lorne Peak.





Map (3.1)

Map showing original subdivision plans on Greenvale (Run 323) and Cainard Stations (Run 420a and 6) in 1922.

The areas shaded red indicate the northeast portion of Greenvale and the Lake Face portion of Cainard to be excluded for a new run, and its homestead site on Allen Flat.

The area shaded blue on Allen Flat was to be divided into farms. The area shaded green adjoining the Fairlight railway station was to be set aside as a homestead site for Fairlight Station to the south (Run 352a).

Map based on part Crown Sale Plan No. 332 (1903). Annotated by the author based on maps and written material in Cainard Pastoral Run License File: DABW/18837/D86/101b PRL 413 Vol. 1 1903-1933, Cainard Station; Archives New Zealand, Dunedin Branch.

disbelief that they were to be deprived of the Lake Face portion of their run, the only safe country for wintering hoggets. Only two years earlier, the importance of the Lake Face was highlighted to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, when the partners requested an extension of their lease after losing over 6,500 sheep in the 1918 winter.<sup>52</sup> Even with the Lake Face, the partners had lost 10,681 sheep, or over two-thirds of their flock in just four years.<sup>53</sup> The removal of the Lake Face, they claimed, would lead to 'the ruination of the station' as the rest of the run was 'practically useless except for summer country' and would create a need to buy in 'sheep every season to keep up the flock'.<sup>54</sup> The Greenvale lessees were no less disappointed. Margaret and Robert Matheson, argued that the carrying capacity of Greenvale would be 'seriously reduced' if Allen Flat and the northeast portion were taken from the run. Once again fears of the snow risk were foremost in their minds. In 1918, 3,500 sheep were lost on Greenvale and had taken two years to recoup. Were the subdivision to proceed, the Mathesons reckoned, a winter similar to 1918 would probably result in greater losses.<sup>55</sup> Runholder concerns, particularly on Cainard and Greenvale were well founded. The subdivision plans, as they stood in 1921, were to the doubtful benefit of anyone – merely creating another marginal run while rendering two existing runs virtually unviable.

By late 1922, however, the Land Board began doubt their own proposals, while at the same time the lessees of the two runs came up with their own compromise to which the Land Board acceded: Greenvale would retain Allen Flat, its northeast portion and take the Lake Face from Cainard. In return the Mathesons would grant to Cainard all the flat country on the northern bank of the Mataura River running along Greenvale's southern boundary (see Map. 3.2).<sup>56</sup> Cainard would gain much needed winter country and agricultural land close to its homestead, while Greenvale, by taking over the Lake Face on which its sheep had always grazed illegitimately, would remove a source of ill-feeling between the two stations for many years.<sup>57</sup> Thus the proposed subdivision of Greenvale and Cainard was turned into an adjustment of boundaries. As helpful as

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<sup>52</sup> Ernest Denny to CCL, Southland, 19 June 1919; 378/98; PRL 413 Vol. 1 Cainard.

<sup>53</sup> Swift and Denny to CCL, Southland, 14 July 1922; 411/85; PRL 412 Greenvale.

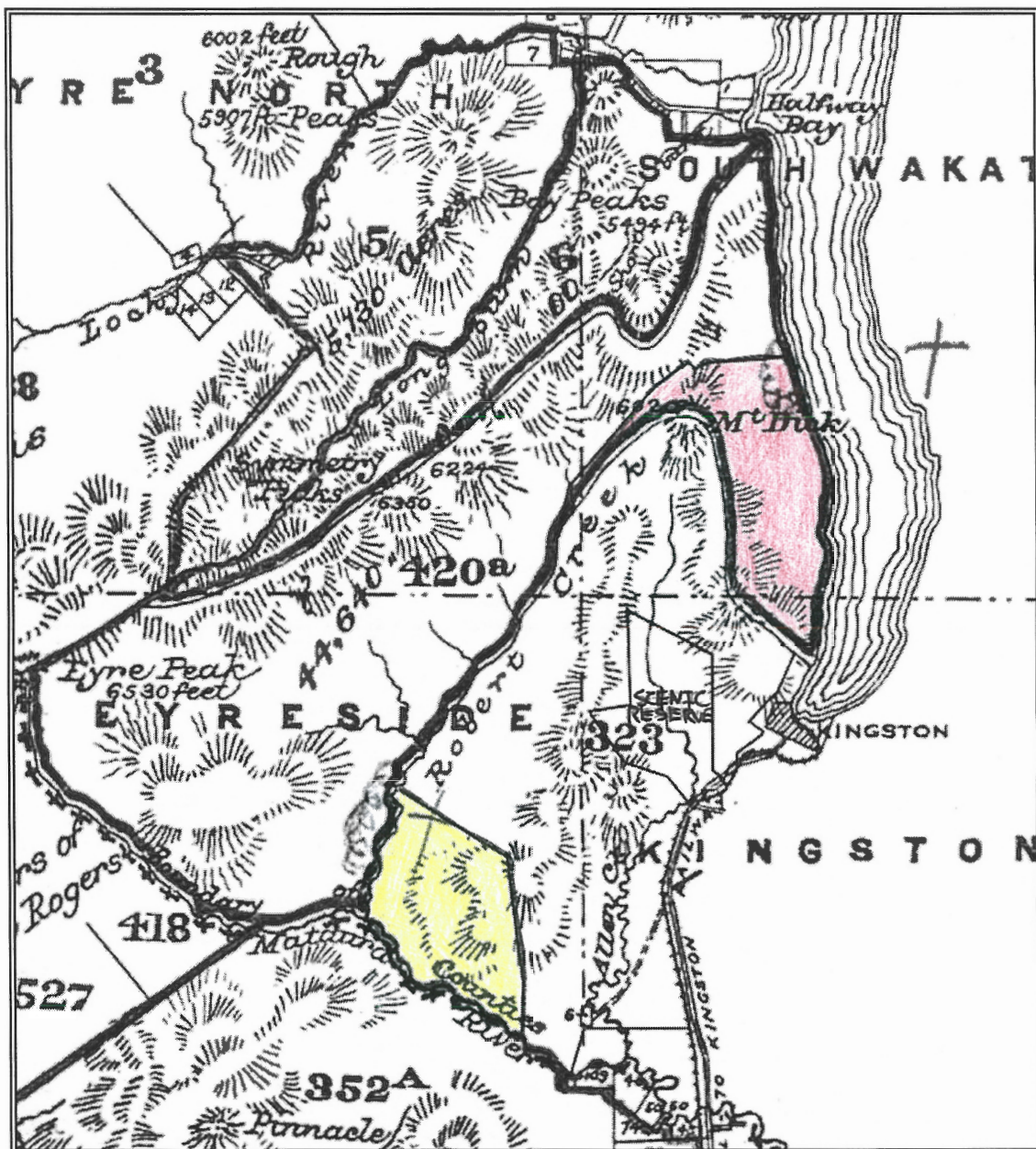
<sup>54</sup> Denny and Swift to CCL, Southland, 2 April 1921; 378/77; PRL 413 Vol. 1 Cainard.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret and Robert Matheson to CCL, Southland, 23 May 1921; 315/59; PRL 412 Greenvale.

<sup>56</sup> CCL, Southland, to Denny and Swift, 20 December 1922; 378/109; Denny and Swift to CCL, Southland, 3 January 1923; 378/110; PRL 413 Vol. 1 Cainard.

<sup>57</sup> CCL, Southland, to USL, 23 January 1923; 378/91; Ibid.





Map (3.2)

Map showing final boundary adjustments to Greenvalley (Run 323) and Cainard Stations (Runs 420a & 6) as agreed to by the leaseholders and the Southland Land Board in 1923.

The area shaded red, comprising the Lake Face block of Cainard, was transferred to Greenvalley. The areas on Allen Flat, previously intended for closer settlement and a homestead site for the new run, were retained in Greenvalley. The area shaded yellow, being the southwest portion of Greenvalley along the Mataura River, was transferred to Cainard.

Map based on part Crown Sale Plan No. 332 (1903). Annotated by the author based on maps and written material in Cainard Pastoral Run License File: DABW/18837/D86/101b PRL 413 Vol. 1 1903-1933, Cainard Station; Archives New Zealand, Dunedin Branch.

the adjustments were to run management, it is important not to overstate their benefits. Cainard remained one of the coldest and highest runs in Southland and the acquisition of the Lake Face did not fully compensate Greenvale for the loss of a significant portion of its winter and agricultural country to Cainard.

Across the Kingston plain, the question of Lorne Peak's subdivision remained. Despite the exceptional snowfalls in the winter of 1923 raising some doubts, the three-way subdivision of Lorne Peak was enacted in 1926 (Map. 3.3). Yet it was effectively frustrated by the current leaseholder, Edward Francis Blakley, who accepted the northern subdivision (323a) while the central block (323b) was balloted to one of his sons.<sup>58</sup> The two runs were worked together as Lorne Peak, albeit as a slightly smaller property.

The alterations to Greenvale and Cainard's boundaries in 1923 were not enough to save the current tenants. By the end of the decade, the Mathesons had deserted Greenvale and Denny and Swift had bailed out of Cainard. The story of these two properties, and others, failing, while neighbouring runs in the region prospered, albeit briefly, was reflective of the economic and environmental volatility of the 1920s. Congruent with this was the development of common concerns among the runholders of the Wakatipu over rising labour costs, persistent snow losses, and the resurgence of a familiar winged menace. It led, in 1919, to the establishment of the Wakatipu Sheep Owners' Union, one of the first local runholder bodies in Otago.

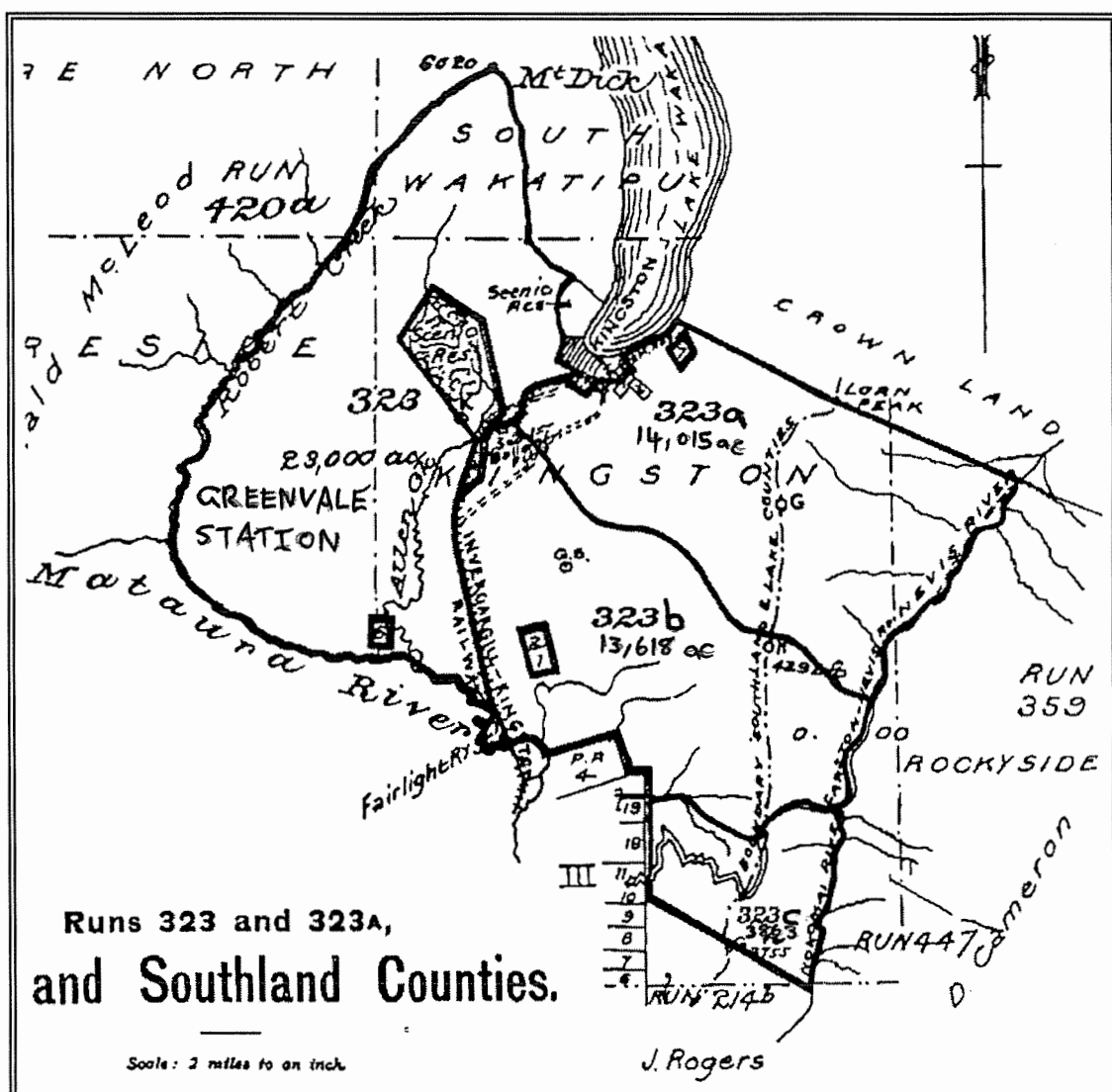
### **The Wakatipu Sheep Owners' Union**

Established as a sub-branch of the provincial Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union, the first meeting of the Wakatipu Sheepowners' Union met in July 1919.<sup>59</sup> Leadership of the Wakatipu branch was drawn from the large flockowners and men of local standing – John Mackenzie of Walter Peak and Mt Nicholas Stations was appointed president, while R.M. Paterson of Ayrburn and Mt Aurum Station and G.S.

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<sup>58</sup> CCI, Southland, to USL, 28 May 1926; 316/133; PRL 316 Lorne Peak.

<sup>59</sup> The Wakatipu Sheepowners' Union was initially intended to be independent of and separate from the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union, known as the Lake County Branch of the New Zealand Employers and Sheepowners Federation. On the advice, however, of the Secretary of the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union, A.S. Cookson, it became a sub-branch of that regional body.



Map (3.3)

Map showing the subdivision of Lorne Peak (323a), 1926.

In 1926 Lorne Peak Station (36,390 acres) was subdivided into three runs. The Lorne Peak lessee, Edward Blakely, took up the northern subdivision (323a), while his son Norman Blakely was balloted the middle subdivision (323b). The two properties were worked together as Lorne Peak.

Map based on part Crown Sale Plan No. 479 (1911). Annotated by the author based on maps and written material in Lorne Peak Pastoral Run License File: DABW/18837/D86/95d PRL 316 1911-1927, Lorne Peak Station; Archives New Zealand, Dunedin Branch.



Cainard Hogget Block. Mataura River in foreground and Eyre Peak in distance. Part of the country taken from Greenvale in 1923.

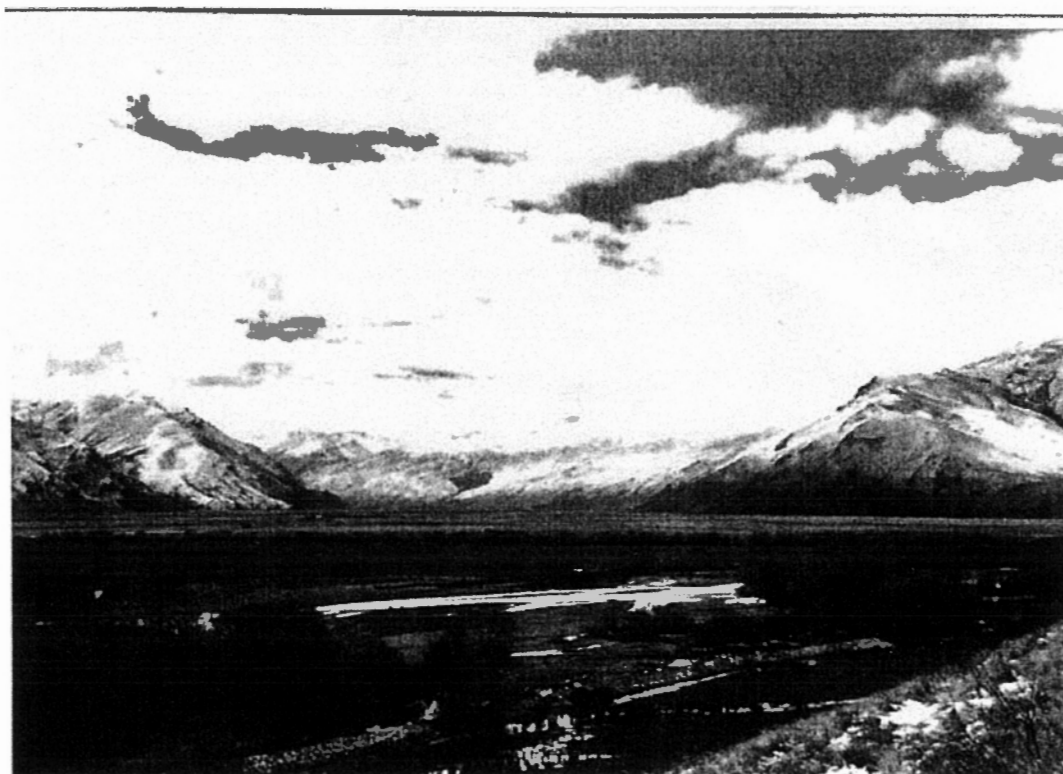


Fig. (3.5)

‘The Gateway of the Wakatipu’

Looking north towards Lake Wakatipu from the Mataura River. Allen Flat in the middle distance, Hector Mountains and Lorne Peak (right), Eyre Mountains and Greenvale (left).

Photos: Peter Chandler  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

Edie of Glencoe Station were vice-presidents. J.W. Miller, manager of Coronet Peak Station, was appointed the branch secretary. It is unclear what criterion determined membership, but like its parent body, membership of the Wakatipu Union was overwhelmingly runholder dominated with nearly all of the high country leaseholders in the region becoming members.

The formation of the Wakatipu Union might be considered incongruous at a time when the Otago Sheepowners' Union was struggling to attract members, particularly among smaller sheepowners who were still holding aloof. Several issues, however, appear to have brought runholders together and encouraged the formation of the Lake County branch. Following the severe sheep losses during the 1918 winter, many runholders desired an extension to their leases. Petitions were drawn up for presentation to the Land Boards requesting one-year license extensions.<sup>60</sup> There was also a feeling among Lake County sheepowners that their particular interests were not adequately represented on the provincial body. One of the first successes of the Wakatipu Union was to have two local members (G.S. Edie and R.M. Paterson) appointed to the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union Executive.<sup>61</sup>

Like the regional body, labour matters occupied much of the attention of the local sheepowners union. Apart from a small reduction in 1922, award rates for shearing and other pastoral labourers generally increased during the 1920s as wool prices improved. The Wakatipu sheepowners, however, continued to oppose wage increases.<sup>62</sup> Their opposition, and the use of collective action to combat it, was based on two points. First, owing to its isolation Wakatipu woolgrowers were already regularly forced to pay above the award rates to secure shearers. The union accepted breaches in the award rate but urged sheepowners to make extra payments in the form of a bonus.<sup>63</sup> In 1929 the Wakatipu sheepowners agreed that 'where possible award rates should be adhered to and that under pressure of circumstances a bonus of 1s per

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<sup>60</sup> Requests for support from the regional Sheepowners' Executive, however, were turned down. It was considered inadvisable for the Union to officially associate itself with the petitions, leaving the Wakatipu members to make representations on their own behalf; Meeting of Executive, 8 September 1919, O&S SIUE - Minute Book: 1911-14, 120-21.

<sup>61</sup> Meeting of Executive, 5 September 1919, *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>62</sup> Twenty-First Meeting of WSOU, 27 May 1927, WSOU Minute Book.

<sup>63</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report and AGM, 1925, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.



sheep be not exceeded'.<sup>64</sup> The second argument against wage increases was that the higher overhead costs of production such as transport charges on wool, stock and materials, as compared with farmers closer to the main centres of business, partially offset increases in wool prices and therefore Wakatipu farmers could not afford such large increases in rates. A measure of calm in the wage debate was introduced in 1928 when the Shearer and Sheepowner Unions adopted a sliding scale for shearing rates based on the export price of wool. This system would persist, almost unbroken, for the next two decades.

### **‘Either the keas or the runholders must go’: The runholder campaign against the kea ‘menace’ and the conservation movement**

Kea predation on sheep was another local issue that was both an indirect motivation behind the formation of the Wakatipu Union and a frequent topic of discussion among its members. Since the early decades of pastoralism in the Wakatipu, the kea, New Zealand’s native mountain parrot, had at times proved to be an expensive threat to valuable flocks. As a pest however, they still came a distant second to the rabbit with their numbers being controlled as needed. Yet from the late 1910s and early 1920s, the kea menace was perceived to be worsening. A large shortage in the 1918 shearing muster at the Head of Lake was attributed to keas although no reason could be given for their increased activity.<sup>65</sup> In late 1918, a meeting of affected runholders was held to discuss the growing problem and saw the formation of the ‘The Lake County Association for the Destruction of Keas’ to press for action to combat the pest.<sup>66</sup>

From 1919 onwards, runholders argued their case through the dual mechanisms of the local and regional branches of the Sheepowners’ Union and the Lake County Council. The Wakatipu delegates to the Sheepowners’ Union highlighted the kea ‘problem’ in the Lakes District and succeeded in having the matter referred to the Sheepowners’ Federation conference in Wellington for consideration.<sup>67</sup> Several runholders also sat on the Lake County Council, including W.S. Reid (The Branches), A.A. McCaughan

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<sup>64</sup> Twenty-Ninth Meeting of WSOU, 1 November 1929, WSOU Minute Book.

<sup>65</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 19 February 1918.

<sup>66</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 10 September 1918.

<sup>67</sup> Meeting of Executive, 8 September 1919, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

(Glen Nevis), Leo Lee (Ben Lomond) and W.A. Scaife (of Glendhu Station, Wanaka). The representations of runholders was strong enough that in December 1918, the Lake County Council agreed to pay a subsidy of 2s per head and recommended to central government and other county councils to take similar action.<sup>68</sup> The 1920 Pastoral Commission also recommended 'that the destruction of the kea should be encouraged as much as possible'.<sup>69</sup> From October 1920 the Government increased its bounty to 5s per beak.

With some runholders paying their own bounty and the Lake County Council subsidy of 2s per beak on top of a Government bounty of 5s a head, kea killing proved a useful source of additional income for high country shepherds and musterers. It also meant the killing became largely indiscriminate. On The Branches Station the runholder, W.S. Reid, paid his employees a bounty of 3s per beak. During the winter of 1919 the station manager, George Robertson, and another shepherd patrolled the vast station in frigid conditions, watching over sheep and on the lookout for kea. At the end of July, Robertson informed his boss that they were 'still alive but dam [sic] near frozen', and that the kea had 'made a savage start and we are kept going every night, very hard'. Twenty-two birds had been killed in two nights.<sup>70</sup> During July and August of 1919, Robertson and a junior cadet, Donald Sutherland, shot no less than 74 keas between them.<sup>71</sup> Sutherland alone killed 58 birds between July and November 1919.<sup>72</sup> Any kea nests that were discovered were destroyed, including chicks and unhatched eggs.<sup>73</sup> By August 1921, less than a year after the Government bounty was increased, over 3,500 beaks were received and £900 pounds paid out.<sup>74</sup> In Lake County, the Council purchased 3,565 kea beaks between 1920 and September 1924.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 17 December 1918.

<sup>69</sup> Southern Pastoral Lands: Report, *AJHR*, C-15, 1920, 23.

<sup>70</sup> George Robertson to W.S. Reid, 26 July 1919, Donald Reid Correspondence - The Branches 1916-21.

<sup>71</sup> GE (Rocky) Robertson – extracts from diary 1919 in 'Run Diary, 1875-1987', Wakatipu Runs Research: Runs, Diaries and Accounts, (MS-1270-2-3/001), Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

<sup>72</sup> Employees at The Branches from W.S. Reid's Wage Book in 'Runs A-B', Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers.

<sup>73</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 4 March 1924.

<sup>74</sup> For the year 1919-20, when the bounty was only 1s per beak, the Government paid out just £46 pounds. *Lake County Press*, 18 August 1921, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 24 September 1924.



Mt Earnslaw Shearing Gang c. 1928. Runholder Henry Adams far right.



Fig. (3.6)

Adams Family, Mt Earnslaw Station, 1928.  
 From left to right: Fred Adams, George Adams, Charles Adams, R Greenslade, Mrs H  
 Adams, Henry Adams, Miss Gilling, George Love, J.W. Adams, Melvin Greenslade

Originals: Mrs G. Soper  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



This level of destruction did not go unnoticed by the wider general public. As Paul Star has shown, native bird protection had become an important issue by the first decades of the twentieth century, 'powered both by the physical evidence of a decline in what might be celebrated, and by a social desire to identify and hold onto the things which made New Zealand special'.<sup>76</sup> Yet just as most of the charges against the kea came from anecdotal accounts by runholders and shepherds, defenders of the mountain parrot also had little scientific evidence to argue their case. G.R. Marriner's 1908 publication, *The Kea: A New Zealand Problem*, attempted to reconcile the largely circumstantial evidence of the two opposing viewpoints. Ultimately he could do no more than conclude that the circumstantial evidence for kea attacking sheep was stronger than the circumstantial evidence against it. He also considered that runholders often exaggerated the damage done by the bird.<sup>77</sup> A decade later, critics of the bounty system acknowledged that some kea became sheep killers, but argued that bounties encouraged, 'kea farming' and the killing of kea in barren mountainous areas where most birds would have never seen a sheep, much less attacked one.

While such arguments contained a fair amount of logic, they failed to appreciate the depth of feeling and objectives of the high country farmers. For runholders, raising the bounty was not intended to merely control kea numbers on their own properties, but to do precisely what preservationists found objectionable - taking the campaign against the kea beyond the range of high country pastoral farming and into the wilderness areas. G.D. Baird of Mt Soho Station suggested in 1918 that a 5s bounty was insufficient to tempt 'kea hunters' to go out and search for the bird or 'get right to the headquarters of the pest'.<sup>78</sup> For many high country men the problem therefore was not the propensity for some kea to turn into sheep killers, but the kea as a species. As one Lake County Councillor said in 1928: 'Keas were a pest and a curse to runholders; it would have been a good thing for New Zealand if they had never been known'.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Paul Star, 'Native Bird Protection, National Identity and the Rise of Preservation in New Zealand to 1914', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36, 2 (2002), 133.

<sup>77</sup> George R. Marriner, *The Kea: A New Zealand Problem*, (Christchurch: Marriner Bros & Co, 1908)

<sup>78</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 10 September 1918.

<sup>79</sup> *Lake County Press*, 26 January 1928, 3.

By the late 1920s the carnage was reaching its height. The Lake County Council, the only county authority offering a bonus, had paid for 5,392 kea beaks by July 1927.<sup>80</sup> Many, if not most of the heads had come from outside the region, and thus by 1927, having paid out over £500 in bounties, the Lake County Council considered abolishing the subsidy.<sup>81</sup> The Wakatipu runholders responded by having the Otago Sheepowners' Union call for the Lake, Wallace, Vincent, Waitaki and Southland Counties to subsidise the Government bonus, and for the Government to allow the extermination of keas on sanctuaries and National Parks.<sup>82</sup> On the first point runholders were moderately successful. The Lake County Council agreed to continue the subsidy, albeit with restrictions.<sup>83</sup> Vincent County was the only other Otago region to come into line with a kea subsidy.<sup>84</sup> Bureaucratic disagreements, however, between the Internal Affairs Department and the Tourist Department meant runholders were less successful in having protection of kea in national parks lifted.<sup>85</sup> The public outcry over the kea killing was given fresh impetus in 1929 by an editorial in the *Otago Daily Times* criticising the bounty system.<sup>86</sup> That same year the Minister of Lands was forced to compromise, halving the bounty to 2s 6d per beak. While this abated the killing of kea, the issue of kea extermination remained ever present and would periodically flare up as runholders' alleged kea attacks on sheep were increasing.

## Conclusion

At the start of the decade, the 1920 Pastoral Lands Commission offered some insights into runholder concerns and pastoral management practices. Recommendations by the

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<sup>80</sup> *Lake County Press*, 28 July 1927, 2.

<sup>81</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report for 30/4/27 and Minutes of AGM 31/5/27, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> In order to stem the flow of beaks from other regions, the Council required runholders to certify that the keas had been shot in Lake County and that they themselves had shot the birds, or had paid their own subsidy of at least 2s 6d per beak.

<sup>84</sup> *Lake County Press*, 17 November 1927, 3; The Canterbury Sheepowners' Union on the other hand, considerably more influential than its counterpart south of the Waitaki, persuaded all county councils from North Canterbury to Marlborough to pay a bonus for kea beaks - O&S SIUE Annual Report for 30/4/28 and Minutes of AGM 7/6/28, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

<sup>85</sup> In 1928 the Minister of Internal Affairs authorised the Commissioner of Crown Lands to issue permits for kea destruction in the Mount Cook reserve. He was unaware, however, that the lease over the area, issued to the Mount Cook Company by the Tourist Department, allowed the Company to prohibit the shooting of kea at any time. When the kea hunters arrived at the Hermitage in January 1928, at the height of the tourist season, they were, not surprisingly, refused access to shoot the birds. *Lake County Press*, 26 January 1928; 2 February 1928; 5 April 1928.

<sup>86</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 25 July 1929, 8.

Commission led to changes to pastoral tenure in 1921 and 1922, providing for license extensions and renewals. Both proved very popular for those looking to gain relief from low prices and snow losses during the early 1920s, and those who wished to have their current or future improvements protected by a longer lease. The prohibiting of all tussock burning without Land Board permission was the other main feature of the 1922 legislation. Evidence presented to the Commission and archival records show that although most runholders believed in restricted firing of tussock, only a handful of requests to burn were actually made during the 1920s and for specific reasons.

Once again the snowstorms in 1923 were the major environmental setback, particularly when runholders were still recouping losses from the 1918 winter. Several, however, had instituted measures since 1918 to mitigate the effects of snow. Recovery was also assisted by strong wool prices, particularly over the later half of the decade. If only compared to what preceded and what followed them, the mid to late 1920s was a brief period of economic prosperity. High wool prices also contributed to drive up land and stock values. Several runs bought at this period were over priced and consequently some runholders were over burdened by mortgages. The failures of Kawarau Falls, Cainard and Greenvale during the 1920s illustrated how stock losses, poor returns and heavy liabilities could quickly overwhelm runholders.

Wage demands continued to dominate industrial matters. These in part contributed to the establishment of the Wakatipu Sheepowners' Union in 1919, as did the desire for relief from snow losses and concerns over a worsening kea problem. The issue of kea destruction illustrated the political influence sheepowners still possessed, particularly when driven by a small number of runholders close to the Southern Alps. The raising of the Government bounty in 1920 was a victory for runholders but once the killing of kea became indiscriminate public opposition proved a formidable opponent.



G.H. Shaw (centre) at 'Rats Nest', Greenstone run.

Original: M McDonald  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library



**Fig. (3.7)**

Lord Jellicoe at Elfin Bay, mid-1920s.

Left to Right: Alex Mackenzie, James Reid, Captain Curtis, Letty Elliot (Birchdale), John Mackenzie (at rear), Mrs G Shaw (Elfin Bay), G.H. Shaw, Lord Jellicoe, Peter Mackenzie, Hugh Mackenzie senior.

Original: D Scott "Rees Valley"  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library



**Fig. (3.8)**

Old 'Coronet Peak' Hut, The Branches – Typical environment of the Kea.

Original: Mrs J.W. Miller  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



**Fig. (4.1)**

Looking north up the western shore of northern arm of Lake Wakatipu. Thomson Mountains (left), Elfin Bay (middle-distance) and Ailsa Mountains (centre), Caples Valley (right, far-distance). Note the glaciated mountain sides rising steeply from the lake.

Photo: D.L. Homer  
Original: Ian Turnbull  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library

## CHAPTER FOUR

# **‘A burden beyond the capacity of the people to carry’: The 1930s**

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The worldwide economic depression of 1929-34 was the defining feature of the decade for Wakatipu runholders. The Depression has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, both in terms of the rural and urban experience. Little has been written on the experience of the pastoralist, except to reaffirm that for several years wool growing became an unprofitable industry. This chapter will examine the runholders' experience of the Depression, from the initial collapse in wool prices, the efforts to secure relief from the Crown and creditors and attempts to cut expenses and diversify incomes. From the mid-1930s, as wool prices recovered, many stations were left with large arrears of rent and interest to clear. It also saw the start of the reorganisation of farm finance and in some cases the altering of pastoral practices to adapt to the new economic circumstances. What the 1930s did make apparent was that high country farming was becoming an increasingly economically marginal livelihood, particularly in remote back-country locations such as the Wakatipu Basin. It also illustrated how heavily mortgaged some pastoral runs were and the lack of capital among many runholders. Several runs fell into a cycle of debt out of which they never fully recovered and ensured the effects of the lean years in the early 1930s would be felt for at least the next decade.

### **Economic Depression**

The extent of hardship in New Zealand during the Depression continues to be a debated topic. The historiography tells us that the Depression affected New Zealand society rather unevenly.<sup>1</sup> The unemployed, the unskilled and the majority of Maori suffered the most. Those whose incomes remained relatively stable found their real incomes increased as prices fell allowing the consumption of consumer goods to continue unabated. This group, generally, did not include farmers, since the prices of

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<sup>1</sup> See G.R. Hawke, *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125.



their outputs fell more than the prices they paid for goods. Yet there remained considerable variance among the fortunes of this sector. Tom Brooking points out that some of the larger pastoralists were able to ride out the lean years of the early 1930s on the back of reserves accumulated during the temporarily high prices of the 1920s. Small farmers on the other hand, particularly those on marginal land, lacking capital and credit worthiness, fared much worse.<sup>2</sup> The rural sector did, however, receive the bulk of government assistance, ensuing from the belief that in order to keep primary production levels maintained and thus keep the cornerstone of the New Zealand economy and society secure, farmers must be kept on their land.

For the fine woolgrower on the high country, the cause of hardship is relatively simple to account for – wool prices dropped to a level far below the cost of production. While the Depression turned fine wool growing into a hopelessly uneconomic proposition for several years, some runholders in the Wakatipu fared better than others. Many variables had a bearing on how runholders coped with the downturn. Such factors included debt levels, mortgage liabilities, the attitude of a runholder's stock agent, being able to draw upon accumulated capital reserves or outside sources of income and the ability to reduce working costs. Some of the hardest hit were the heavily mortgaged runholders on more marginal country and whose livelihood depended solely on the wool returns from their run. In the most extreme instance, the Shaw family of Elfin Bay Station were reduced to almost subsistence pastoralism. By 1932, even the largest, and arguably most successful, runholders in the Wakatipu, the Mackenzies, were seeking relief from the Land Board.

Generally speaking the experience of the Wakatipu pastoralist during the Depression follows a rather orthodox pattern. Wool and stock prices fell to record low in late 1929 and remained depressed until 1934 before recovering but remaining volatile until the start of the second wool commandeer. Runholders were nursed through the period, mainly by their stock agents, but also aided by liberal relief from the Crown and mortgagees. As conditions improved the clearance of rent and mortgage arrears could begin and a readjustment of liabilities and farm finance got underway. Yet the

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Geoffrey W. Rice ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 251.



economic stringency of the 1930s was compounded by that other factor beyond farmers' control – the weather. Heavy snowfalls in 1933 and in particular 1939, killed large numbers of sheep, reduced lambing rates and lightened wool clips. The need to purchase replacement stock placed further strain on already limited finances. Economic depression and snow ensured that few runholders ended the decade in a better position than when they entered. Somewhat ironically it took the economic slump, and the detailed assessments of pastoral runs generated by landlord and stock agent as demanded by the financial circumstances, to reveal how economically marginal some of these backcountry properties were. In some cases the experience of the 1930s led to a reconsideration of how future modes of pastoralism should be undertaken in the Wakatipu high country.

The winter and spring of 1929 were favourable across Otago with average stock mortality, some 'highly satisfactory' lambing returns and a heavy wool clip.<sup>3</sup> Expectations for the 1929-30 wool auctions were high as the previous season's sales had returned solid, albeit falling, prices with top Merino and half-bred wool fetching well over 20d per lb.<sup>4</sup> What the woolgrowers met, however, in late 1929 and early 1930 was a commodity market in freefall following the Wall Street Crash. The branch manager of the N.M.A.'s Dunedin office reported a fifty per cent fall in wool prices during the 1929-30 season.<sup>5</sup> In 1930 Cainard's wool returns were down by £1,640, Mt Earnslaw's by £1,297 and Wyuna's revenue shrunk by £1,500. Coronet Peak Station received just £10 per bale.<sup>6</sup> Wool that cost around a shilling to produce per lb. was selling for little more than half that price, or around 6d per lb. Relatively inflexible costs of production exacerbated the situation. The previous fifteen years had seen rentals and finances become upwardly adjusted in line with wool prices. On Walter Peak Station the last time wool prices were at such a low level, over twenty years previously, rents and rates amounted to around £250. In 1931 the same expenses were well over £1,000 per annum.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Lake Wakatipu Mail*, 19 November 1929.

<sup>4</sup> *Lake County Press*, 9 February 1928, 3.

<sup>5</sup> N.M.A. Dunedin Branch Manager's Report 31/3/30, N.M.A. Managers' Reports, 1928-1932, Box 276, (UN-028), NMA Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>6</sup> Coronet Peak – McLean and Bremner in 'Runs CO-E', Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

<sup>7</sup> H Mackenzie and Sons to CCL, Southland, 27 May 1932; 420/37; DABW/18837/D86/112b PRL 522 Walter Peak 1923-1949, ANZ/D.

While the fall in prices was alarming it did not initially result in a rush for assistance or relief. Rents were, as usual, advanced by the mercantile agencies and on many runs various expenses were paid from capital resources rather than profits. The Shaws of Elfin Bay Station, for example, had to realise some B.N.Z shares to pay rates, insurance and wages during the 1930-31 season.<sup>8</sup> Some runholders held their clip over in anticipation of a quick return to better prices. Carrying one's wool over, however, ran the risk of having prices fall further. The Mackenzies, whose custom it was to ship their wool to the London market, held on to their 1930 and 1931 clips, but when it eventually met the market, at its lowest in 1932, obtained returns of one-third of previous years.<sup>9</sup> Keeping wool in store also caused anxiety for stock agents because reducing their clients' overdrafts was dependent on wool returns. G.R. Ritchie wanted head office consulted if pastoral clients proposed holding over their wool for the 1930-31 sales, as it was 'quite evident they have lost money by holding last season'.<sup>10</sup>

As Kevin O'Connor has observed, the most obvious tactic to offset low wool prices was to increase the stocking load on the unimproved range.<sup>11</sup> Sheep numbers, across twenty-one Wakatipu Stations, increased from 163,593 in 1929 to 178,895 in 1931. As station finance would not allow the purchase of extra stock, much of the increase in sheep numbers probably came from the retention of surplus or aged stock normally sent away in the annual draft. As Wright Stephenson & Co. informed the Southland Commissioner with regards to Lorne Peak Station, the 'annual draft of surplus ewes and wethers did not go away this autumn, as debtor considers it good policy to keep property stocked up to easy carrying capacity and to have increased wool clip next season. Present prospects for wool confirm his policy'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Annie Shaw, Private and Personal Letter to Mr McDonald, CCL, 31 March 1931; 466/115; PRL 403 Elfin Bay.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Mackenzie & Sons to CCL, Southland, 27 May 1932; 420/37; PRL 522 Walter Peak.

<sup>10</sup> G.R. Ritchie to Dunedin Branch, 28 November 1930; NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1929-31 V. 4, Box 66, NMA Records, 331.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin O'Connor, 'The Use of Mountains: A Review of New Zealand Experience', in *The Land, Our Future: essays on land use and conservation in honour of Kenneth Cumberland*, A. Grant Anderson (ed.), (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980), 210.

<sup>12</sup> Wright Stephenson & Co. to CCL, Southland, undated letter; DABW/18837/D86/111e PRL 518 Run 323b, 1928-1947, ANZ/D.

As 1931 arrived and it was apparent that wool and stock prices were only going to get worse before they got better, runholder requests for assistance from the district Land Boards began to flow in. Many runholders found their stock agents suddenly unwilling to continue to extend finance, save for the bare necessities of working the run. All advances by the N.M.A. on Wyuna's highly unsatisfactory account were suspended in 1931, including the sending of petrol, until a future policy was decided.<sup>13</sup> On Lorne Peak, Wright Stephenson & Co. who held no security on an overdraft of over £5,000, could not make any further payments on account of rent, as they still had to make provision for the cost of working the run for the coming season.<sup>14</sup> James Burnett of Halfway Bay found Dalgety & Co. unwilling to advance him money to pay his rent in 1931, after his current account deteriorated by nearly £3,000 in two years. Like many aspects of the Depression, this left some runholders in an embarrassing position, as James Burnett said, 'I am quite keen to pay my rent as the [Land] Board has been very kind to me in the past.' And with a run fully stocked with sheep, cattle, horses and dairy cows, 'it is hard not to be able to pay one's way'.<sup>15</sup>

Like farmers, the mercantile agencies had been caught up in the land boom of the late 1920s, financing land purchases at inflated values, and finding money for improvements and the reduction of mortgages.<sup>16</sup> When the slump hit they often found themselves exposed and retrenchment was inevitable. Many pastoral accounts were operating unsecured and in several cases the stock agents' position was decidedly precarious. On Mt Earnslaw Station, the N.M.A.'s security, on a current account debit of almost £4,000, amounted to only a second charge over stock and the leasehold behind a first mortgage of some £7,000. The General Manager, G.M. Ritchie, questioned whether, under present circumstances the property would realise much more than the first mortgage. On a property that sold for £18,750 in 1928, Mt

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<sup>13</sup> G.R. Ritchie to Dunedin Branch, 5 May 1931; NMA Correspondence, Dunedin, 1929-31 V. 4, 507.

<sup>14</sup> CCL to Controller of Accounts, Lands and Survey Department, 23 June 1931; 448/27; DABW/18837 D86/111f, PRL 519, Run 323a 1928-1948, ANZ/D.

<sup>15</sup> James Burnett to CCL, Southland, 24 September 1931; 403/72; PRL 403 Halfway Bay.

<sup>16</sup> The majority of information regarding the attitude and actions of stock firms in this chapter comes from the records of the National Mortgage and Agency Company (NMA) who had around half a dozen pastoral clients in the Wakatipu Basin; GM to Dunedin, 28 November 1930, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1929-31 V. 4, 331.

Earnslaw was valued at £10,000 as a going concern in 1931. Accordingly, economy and caution were the watchwords, as Ritchie advised the Dunedin Branch:

It is quite evident that with a drop in wool and stock prices, there is not the equity you imagine in a number of the up-country runs where there is a first charge in front of our security. This being so it is imperative such debts do not increase in coming season.<sup>17</sup>

Clients were similarly informed of the need to cut expenses to a minimum. The Company discriminated between very weak accounts, such as Wyuna and Elfin Bay Stations, and those, such as the McCaughans of Glen Nevis Station, with satisfactory accounts where the Company's advance was safely covered. Adam Hume, lessee of Wyuna, was advised that he 'must consider every penny he spends'.<sup>18</sup>

In light of experience during the depression of the late nineteenth century, foreclosure by the stock firms was generally ruled out. A similar attitude was adopted by Australian mercantile agencies during the 1930s Depression or during prolonged droughts.<sup>19</sup> As early as 1931 the Mortgagees Relief Act also forestalled any moves by mortgagees to instigate a sale or enter into possession of property. Instead it was often up to the agent to put forward arguments against foreclosure. Referring to the Adams' of Cainard Station, Ritchie advised 'it is to our interest to keep them on the place so long as Swift's people [the mortgagee] are reasonable, but beyond this we are not prepared to go, for our security is distinctly weak and this debt is far too high.'<sup>20</sup> The Company realised that on Mt Earnslaw Station a private mortgagee held all the security and 'could take such action as he sees fit'. It was therefore up to the Company to negotiate with the mortgagee so the client could 'keep going so long as [he] can continue to make some headway in the matter of his liabilities, as he seems to be doing'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> GM to Dunedin Office, 28 April 1930, 11 May 1930, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1929-31 V.4, 47, 150.

<sup>19</sup> J.D. Bailey, *A Hundred Years of Pastoral Banking: A History of the Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 255.

<sup>20</sup> GM to Dunedin, 11 September 1931, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1931-33 V.5, Box 66, NMA Records, 47.

<sup>21</sup> GR Ritchie to Dunedin Branch, 16 March 1933, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1933-34, V. 6, Box 66, NMA Records, 37.

With the stock agents tightening credit, it was to the Land Boards that runholders then turned for assistance. It soon became a source of continual irritation to the Lands and Survey Department that runholders should on the one hand strive to meet mortgage and current account interest payments, often considerably heavier than rent charges, but then request from the Land Boards rental remissions. This was the first illustration of how heavily mortgaged or overcapitalised some of the pastoral runs were. Henry Adams of Cainard for example, whose interest payments were a greater expense than rent, was told that the Land Board considered it ‘manifestly improper that a runholder in temporary difficulty should expect the Government to grant the whole of the concession necessary to ease the situation and that mortgagees and others financially interested should do nothing’.<sup>22</sup> The Shaws of Elfin Bay were likewise informed that if the mortgagee would not grant a considerable concession the Land Board would not give a remission of rent.<sup>23</sup> On Halfway Bay, the Crown disputed the seriousness of the financial position. From a purely revenue versus expenditure viewpoint, Halfway Bay showed a modest profit during the 1931-32 season and James Burnett’s account with Dalgety & Co. had been reduced by some £700 over the year. When the Southland Commissioner of Crown Lands demanded payment of rent, it drew a terse response from the manager of Dalgety & Co:

You do not take into account the reduction in stock numbers or the outstanding accounts. Too much stress is laid on revenue only which is not the same as profit ... It is high time landlords and mortgagees took the view that balance sheets are the only way to ascertain the real position of affairs and gave over simply looking at revenue vs. expenditure. Farmers in the past took that line to their sorrow now.<sup>24</sup>

Traditionally rent, legally a first charge against revenue, was paid on the due date by the stock agent as an advance to their client against the current season’s revenue. From the 1930s however, mercantile agents began the practice of delaying their clients’ rent payment until the season’s revenue was collected before offering the

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<sup>22</sup> Memorandum for H Adams from CCL, Southland, 20 March 1931; 413/190; PRL 413 Vol. 1 Cainard.

<sup>23</sup> CCL, Southland to Annie Shaw, 9 April 1931; PRL 466 Elfin Bay.

<sup>24</sup> Manager of Dalgety & Co to CCL, Southland, 2 August 1932; 403/85; PRL 403, Halfway Bay.

Crown a pro-rata share towards outstanding rent if the season's revenue was insufficient to meet expenses. In this case Dalgety's agreed to pay the outstanding rent on Halfway Bay but announced the two subsequent half-yearly payments would have to stand over for consideration after next season's operations and 'if the results are satisfactory we will pay what we can'.<sup>25</sup>

One of the main reasons for the high levels of mortgage indebtedness amongst high country runs was due to properties having been bought at excessive goodwills during the land boom of the early and late 1920s. The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, W.E. Shaw, claimed that the majority of runholders appearing before the Adjustment Commissions in 1937 and 1938 were there as a result of excessive prices paid for runs in the early and late 1920s.<sup>26</sup> Shaw's predecessor, R.S. Galbraith, had prophesied in 1928 that 'such a practice must assuredly spell ruin to the unfortunate one with limited capital who finds himself in possession when heavily-reduced produce-prices come along'. Two such runs in the Wakatipu bought at either end of the land boom were Elfin Bay Station and Mt Creighton Station. George and Annie Shaw bought Elfin Bay in 1922 as a going concern for £5,000, paying £1,500 in cash and the balance on mortgage to the vendor J.W. Miller. Miller had bought Elfin Bay in 1919 for £2,500 as a going concern. The Land Board expressed reservations over the price asked by Miller and his optimistic assessment of the property. Although the Board convinced Miller to reduce the consideration by £500, they still thought the vendor was 'getting too much out of it' and that the Shaws were taking a big risk by paying too much.<sup>27</sup> Although the Shaws were burdened with heavy mortgage liabilities, they continually complained that it was their rent, increased to £75 per annum in 1928, which was unviable. Certainly Elfin Bay's rent was anomalous when on the other side of the Greenstone River, in the Otago Land District, the lease of the 15,690 acre Birchdale Station was renewed in 1932 for thirty-five years at £57 per annum. Moreover, in 1930 Birchdale carried well over 3,000 sheep to Elfin Bay's 2,083, which equated to a rent of 4.5d per head of sheep, half of Elfin Bay's rental per head of sheep. Yet as much as the Shaws complained about their rent, it was hard to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Report of the CCL, Otago on the Sheep Farming Commission, 24 August 1939; Sheep Farming Commission, 1939-1949; DAAK/D84/71d 4/438; ANZ/D.

<sup>27</sup> Land Board Meeting, 20 July 1922; PRL 466, Elfin Bay.

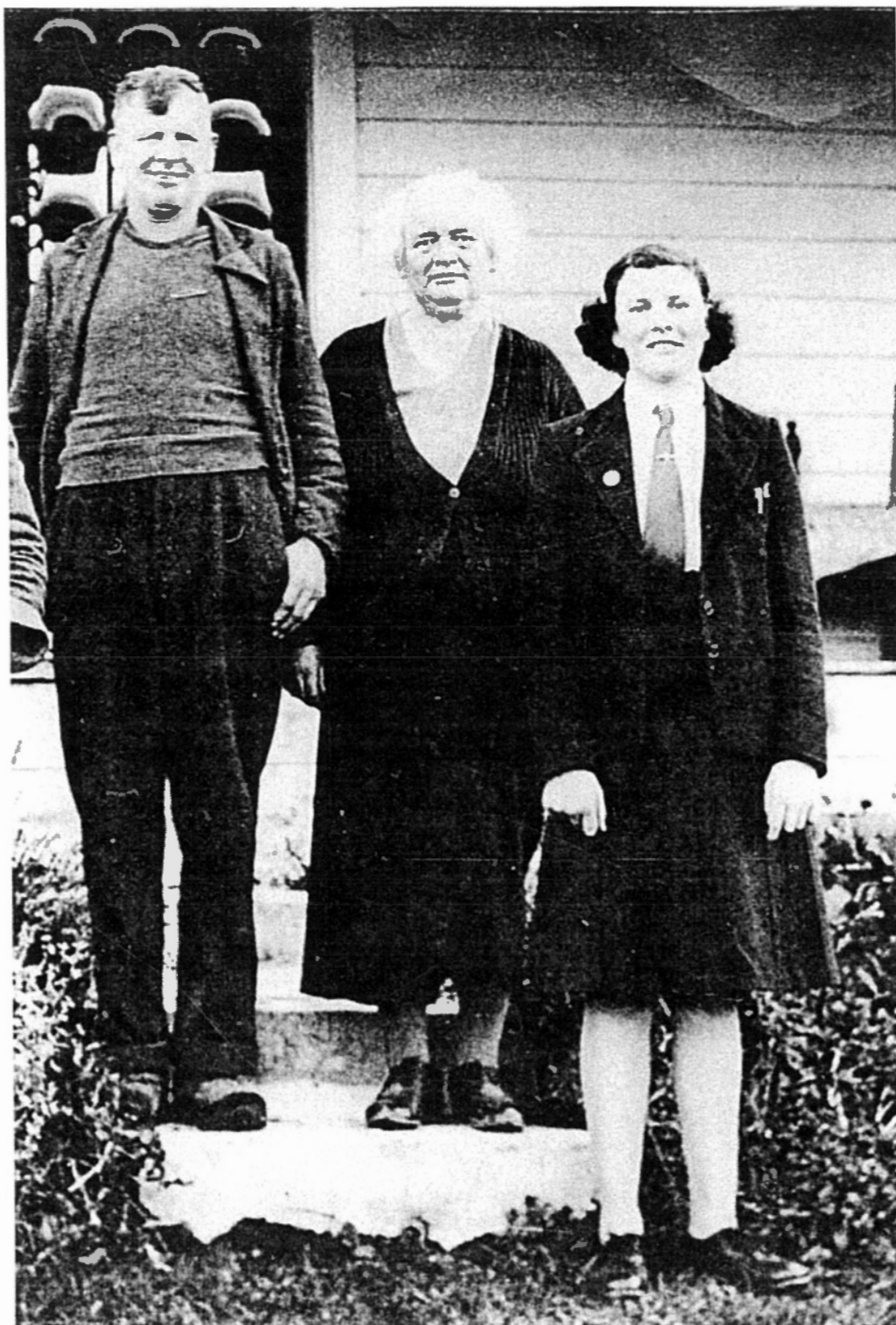


Fig. (4.2)

George Herbert Shaw, Annie Shaw and Margaret (Elfin) Shaw at Elfin Bay circa. 1937-1938.  
The Shaw family owned Elfin Bay Station from 1922 to 1952.

Photo: A Bathgate  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library

ignore heavy mortgage liabilities as the real source of difficulty. In 1931 Elfin Bay's wool returns failed to cover interest payments alone.

On the opposite side of the lake, Mount Creighton Station was transferred to Alexander Beaton in 1929 for £18,500.<sup>28</sup> The run was then transferred again in 1937 for £6,500 less. During Alex Beaton's occupancy, the Crown wrote off rent to the extent of £580.<sup>29</sup> Although these two stations have been given as examples, they were by no means the only runs where the inflexibility of mortgage liabilities proved the greatest squeeze on farm income. Although the Land Boards disagreed that they should bear all of the concessions to relieve runholders, their initial move was to postpone outstanding rent for one year.

The rent question had also initially occupied a low profile among the sheepowners' union. Early in 1931 the Wakatipu branch of the Sheepowners' Union called on the provincial body to 'consider pressing for a reduction in rents on all Crown pastoral and grazing lands'.<sup>30</sup> The Otago Union, however, was largely muted through 1930-31 on the matter of rent with the chairman of the Otago Union simply noting that Land Boards were reasonable in postponing rents and drew runholder attention to the provisions of Section 124 of the Land Act 1924, providing for relief in the event of 'any natural disaster or other sufficient cause'.<sup>31</sup> The Union had been more proactive, but unsuccessful, in attempting to have the Land Act amended in order to protect the assets of leaseholders and ensure rent was paid from profits rather than savings.

A more important issue from the viewpoint of collective action was the engagement of rural labour and attempts to bring about wage reductions to match the prevailing economic conditions. The most notable feature of industrial relations during the Depression years was the change from compulsory to voluntary arbitration in 1932. John E. Martin has most ably examined the effect of the removal of compulsory

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<sup>28</sup> This sum was comprised of £3,000 for the interest in the license, £3,500 for the freehold, and £12,000 for the stock.

<sup>29</sup> Report of the Otago CCL for the Sheep Farming Commission, 24 August 1939, Sheep Farming Commission 1939-1949," DAAK/D84/71d 4/438, ANZ/D.

<sup>30</sup> Thirty-Third Meeting of WSOU, 20 January 1931, WSOU Minute Book.

<sup>31</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report 30/4/31 and AGM 4/6/31, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.



arbitration and the impact of the Depression on workers' wages generally.<sup>32</sup> He concluded that voluntary arbitration did not greatly alter industrial relations, much less bring about a collapse of the arbitration system. Wages did fall generally but the greatest variations were in employment. In the farming sector, the number of persons employed was maintained or even increased but the fall in wages of farm workers was greater than workers in any other sector.<sup>33</sup> For woolgrowers, shearing rates were, as usual, the most contentious issue. From 1928, shearing rates had been tied to export prices on a sliding scale for three seasons. In 1928-1929, the first season, shearers received 30s per hundred sheep. Every subsequent year it fell - by a shilling in 1929-1930, then plunging to 25s in 1930-1931 and 21s in 1931-1932.

With the end of the 1931-1932 season, the awards covering shearers and shed-hands and musterers and packers had lapsed. Shortly afterwards, in April 1932 the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (ICA) Amendment Act was passed. Conciliation remained compulsory but arbitration became voluntary only if both parties agreed. While welcoming the amendment to the ICA Act, the Otago Sheepowners' Union advised that 'employers should ask nothing unfair so that it could not be said sheepowners had taken immediate advantage of the new legislation to exploit the workers'.<sup>34</sup> Generally sheepowners' remained agreeable to continuing the sliding scale system for shearing but many felt the time had come for absolute freedom in the employment of musterers and packers.<sup>35</sup> At the Conciliation Council, sheepowners and shearers failed to reach an agreement leaving freedom of contract in shearing and mustering operations for the 1932-1933 season. The Sheepowners' Union sent out recommendations of minimum wages to its members. The Wakatipu runholders preferred to act in concert, meeting in September 1932 to fix a maximum rate of 18s per 100 sheep.<sup>36</sup> This fall, from 21s the previous season, was not excessive, as across the country reductions ranged from fifteen to twenty per cent with some farmers paying as low as 15s per hundred sheep, rates not seen since the depression of the mid-1890s.<sup>37</sup> Such variability again proved undesirable from both the woolgrowers'

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<sup>32</sup> John E. Martin, 'The Removal of Compulsory Arbitration and the Depression of the 1930s', *New Zealand Journal of History* (28:6, 1994), 124-144.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 137.

<sup>34</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report and AGM 1/6/32, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Thirty-Fifth Meeting of WSOU, 22 September 1932, WSOU Minute Book, 73-75

<sup>37</sup> Martin, 'The Removal of Compulsory Arbitration and the Depression of the 1930s', 131.

and shearers' point of view and the sliding scale system based on wool export prices was again adopted for the three seasons from 1933 to 1936.<sup>38</sup> Sheepowners remained less concerned about renewing the lapsed award for musterers and packers, and were generally satisfied to maintain their freedom of contract in this class of employment.<sup>39</sup>

By 1932, as the economic situation worsened, the Sheepowners' Union turned its attention to the rent question and began considering pressing Government for the remission of rent altogether. That pressure was delivered in the form of a petition, drawn up by the Otago Union Executive and signed by 511 pastoral tenants of the Crown. Pointing out that the gross returns for wool and surplus stock were approximately one-third of what was the average of the ten to fifteen years ending 1929, the petitioners requested 'a remission or refund of the whole or part of one or more years rent; a reduction of rent for the remainder of the lease; and an extension of the term of the lease'. This assistance was requested as an automatic right of tenancy, as the current application process for relief was regarded as being too uncertain and too protracted.<sup>40</sup>

Yet for all the collective action, the assistance given to runholders was still largely dictated by their particular individual circumstances. Furthermore, the extent to which the permissive powers under the Land Act were exercised, were dependent upon the personal opinion of the Land Commissioner for the district concerned. The Southland Land Board, having granted postponements from 1931, began granting remissions of rent from late 1932. Somewhat along the line of the petitioners' request, remissions were general, provided the run was being carried at a loss, and granted on the basis of the rental value. Remissions were normally in the region of twenty to twenty-five percent of the rent, and applied for two years. Any arrears accumulated to that point were postponed.

The Otago Land Board took a similar, if slightly harder line, with its pastoral tenants. In May 1932, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago issued memorandums to

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<sup>38</sup> In 1933-34 the rate was 18s per hundred sheep, 1934-35, 22s 6d as wool prices improved and then falling again in 1935-36 as prices slumped.

<sup>39</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report 30/4/34 and AGM 5/6/34, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

<sup>40</sup> Petition drawn up by the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union Executive praying for relief in O&S SIUE Annual Report 30 April 1932, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

leaseholders in arrears with their rent stating that the 'time has arrived when definite action will have to be taken'. Runholders were informed that concessions would only be given in cases where the tenant was unable to pay. If it was 'considered that the place has sufficient recuperative powers on a return to fair prices to enable the lessee to overtake the arrears, then a postponement may be granted. Remissions of rent will be made only in what might be termed extreme cases'. Little sympathy was forthcoming with the Commissioner pointing out that 'many persons in the humbler walks of life are being forced by the times into meeting their commitments out of their meagre savings in previous years'.<sup>41</sup>

The experience of the slump was slightly different for stations unencumbered by heavy mortgage payments. Like everyone else they were rendered unprofitable for a short time, but did not accumulate large arrears of rent or interest and when prices improved, were able to recover their position more quickly. The only assistance the lessees of Cecil Peak and Walter Peak Stations were given during the slump years was the uniform two-year, twenty-five per cent remission on the rental value. The McCormicks of Closeburn, who kept up with rental payments over the 1930s, received no concessions. The Scotts of Rees Valley Station were granted minor concessions and between 1936 and 1939, as wool prices improved, purchased several large expense items, including a motorcar, an electric light plant, a shearing plant and binder.<sup>42</sup>

Properties in more dire straits were given greater relief on account of genuine financial hardship, but often in return essentially relinquished control over their farming operations. The granting of more substantial concessions was provisional on runholders disclosing their personal financial position, something they were not always willing to do. The Matheson brothers, for instance, consistently refused to declare their extensive assets, even though their Greenvale run was in desperate need of assistance. Not only was having to disclose personal finances personally sensitive, but the fear was that disclosing a position that, on paper, showed considerable wealth

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum for William Paterson, 20 May 1932; PR 1853 Vol. 1, Mt Aurum 1901-1936; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>42</sup> CCL, Otago to Donald Reid & Co., re: Sheep-farming industry commission, 17 August 1939; Folio 120; PR 1869 Rees Valley 1910-1962.

might result in the Crown demanding payment of arrears from those assets.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned above, from late 1931 until 1933, leaseholders had unsuccessfully petitioned to have the Land Act amended to ensure that payments of rent and rates were made out of the profits of the land thereby protecting the private assets of Crown tenants.<sup>44</sup>

In cases where farm incomes were consistently failing to cover rental and interest expenses, Land Boards were willing to enter into profit sharing schemes to secure a proportion of the rent. This normally meant granting further concessions in the form of rental remissions, but Land Boards were prepared to do so provided mortgagees and stock agents agreed to make commensurate allowances. Although the stock and station agent acted as the farmers' chief advocate in negotiations with the Crown and other creditors, the mercantile agencies themselves were not always willing to enter into sharing agreements.<sup>45</sup> The Mortgagors and Tenants Relief Act, passed at the end of 1933, compelled stock mortgagees, usually stock firms, to enter into sharing arrangements. Most agreements were for one or two seasons or until wool prices became remunerative again. Elfin Bay Station's account was under the Chamber of Commerce scheme for six consecutive seasons from 1932 to 1938.

The case of Cainard Station is one illustration of how such agreements between the Crown, mortgagee and stock agent operated. By 1932 the leaseholders of Cainard were in arrears of rent by £708 and the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland said he was not prepared to allow payment of interest while rent was not. The Crown agreed to accept £225 as full settlement of rent for the previous year (1931), remit £285 of the arrears, and postpone the first half-yearly payment for 1932. For its part, J.W. Swift & Co, the mortgagee, would lower its interest to four per cent for one year (a concession of £190) and the stock agent, the N.M.A., would likewise reduce its current account interest to four per cent. The station account then entered into a sharing scheme for the 1931/32 and 1932/33 seasons with any surplus being distributed on a pro rata basis. While the 1931/32 season recorded a deficiency, the

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<sup>43</sup> Indeed when the Mathesons did provide a full statement of assets it showed a value of over £25,000, but the income derived from the same for 1933 amounted to little over £600; Donald Reid & Co. to Officer in Charge Department of Lands and Survey, 29 May 1935; DABW/18837/D86/109a PRL 490 1933-1948; ANZ/D.

<sup>44</sup> O&S SIUE General Meeting, 28 February 1932, O & S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-41.

<sup>45</sup> John H Angus, *Donald Reid*, 74.



**Fig. (4.3)**

Harry Adams of Mt Earnslaw, 1921-1928 and Cainard, 1928-1945.

Original: G. Soper  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



**Fig. (4.4)**

Looking south to Moke Lake from the Richardson Mountains. To the left of the lake (following the road line) is Ben Lomond Station, to its right and south is Closeburn Station, and to its north is part of Mt Creighton Station. Lake Wakatipu is in the distance and beyond it, Walter Peak. During the winter of 1923, snow remained on the Moke Lake flats until mid-September.

Photo: John Barkla

From: Neville Peat, *Queenstown: New Zealand's Adventure Capital*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2004), 52.

1932/33 season's working showed a modest surplus out of which the Department agreed to accept £300 as a full year's rent provided the N.M.A and Swift & Co. again accepted interest at four percent.<sup>46</sup>

Sharing agreements, rental remissions and interest rate reductions were sometimes ineffectual. Lorne Peak Station was operated under a profit sharing arrangement during the 1931-32 and 1932-33 seasons, yet over the five seasons between 1932 and 1936, the run showed an average trading loss of £564 per annum. With a combined rental of £600 per annum, the Crown received £1,578 in rent between 1930 and 1936, postponed another £852 and remitted the balance (£900) and over £300 worth of penalties.<sup>47</sup> Mortgagees assisted by accepting lower rates of interest. The situation did not improve over the second half of the decade, the station recording an average trading loss of £539 per annum.<sup>48</sup> The Bank of New South Wales, the mortgagee, considered Mr Blakley senior a continual source of expense and would have preferred to see his interest in Lorne Peak (Run 323a) transferred to his other son and for him to withdraw altogether.<sup>49</sup> By 1942 the run was still in arrears of rent to the sum of £2,113 and the Blakely's account with Wright Stephenson & Co had blown out to £8,211.<sup>50</sup>

Another option was to sell, but doing so in a depressed market was difficult and would likely involve considerable loss to all interested parties. Only two Wakatipu runs, Mt Creighton and Ben Lomond, were transferred outright between 1930 and 1939.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned earlier Alexander Beaton of Mt Creighton Station sold in 1936 for £12,000, in wool, as a going concern. Beaton had bought Mt Creighton in 1929 as a going concern for £18,500 ex-wool.<sup>52</sup> The Johnson brothers of Ben Lomond Station

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<sup>46</sup> The concession of one half-year rent in 1932 plus another £150 in 1933 was equal to a remission of forty percent of the rent over two years. An amount not considered excessive by the Southland Land Board given the run's consistent losses and snow risk; CCL, Southland to USL, 1/2/34; 413/388; DABW/18837/D86/101c PRL 413 v. 2, Cainard 1933-1946; ANZ/D.

<sup>47</sup> CCL, Southland to USL, 19/2/36; 448/68; PRL 519 Run 323a.

<sup>48</sup> Land Board Minute, 9 May 1940; 491/147; Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> CCL, Southland to USL, 16 February 1934; 448/48; Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Macalister Brothers to CLL, Southland, 3 June 1940; 491/151; Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Mt Soho run was transferred within family; on Coronet Peak Station one of the McLean brothers sold his half share in 1934, and in 1931 Catherine Scott was requested by the mortgagors to resume possession of the Rees Valley leasehold after they could not make the run profitable. Catherine Scott sold the Rees Valley leasehold (Run 18) in 1920 to the Kennet brothers and William Woodley, while retaining the station freehold and Run 14.

<sup>52</sup> Beaton's sale price of £12,000 in wool was equivalent to £9,000 ex-wool. His stock and plant was valued at £15,000 but was sold for £9,000, while leasehold and freehold were sold for £3,000 as against £6,500 in 1929; P 107 Mt Creighton, 1936-61; LINZ ChCh.

sold for £9,500 as a going concern in 1930 when the mortgagee refused to renew the mortgages for the full amount. It was claimed the brothers, who put 'every penny' made from the run into improvements, lost £6,100 on the sale.<sup>53</sup>

The 1930 slump was the final straw for the Blakely's neighbours, Margaret and Robert Matheson of Greenvale Station at the southern end of Lake Wakatipu. With liabilities of nearly £20,000 and owing two years of interest on the mortgage, Margaret and her son, had virtually abandoned the property by early 1930. Unable to find a buyer, the mortgagees Matthew and Alexander Matheson, relations of the former owners and both elderly men, were compelled to enter possession of Greenvale in order to protect their mortgage.<sup>54</sup>

The Mathesons however must be seen as an isolated case and most runholders were satisfied to work through the downturn in anticipation of improved conditions. The Dunedin manager of the N.M.A noted in 1932 that 'taking a general view of their activities, it is wonderful to witness the equanimity with which they regard their position, and the determination which they show in their endeavours to overcome their difficulties.'<sup>55</sup> Perhaps no family fought against a hopeless position more than the Shaws of Elfin Bay Station. Annie Shaw exemplified their attitude in an appeal to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in 1931:

We have worked very hard here and are quite prepared to work still to meet this slump. We are doing our utmost and with wool at 6 ¾d it does little else but pay mustering and shearing wages. Please do not ask me to surrender the run. Certainly we know we paid too much for it but we did not know that at the time. My husband works like two men and we had a hard winter. We have two little children and we are satisfied to keep on this place.<sup>56</sup>

Runholders engaged in various forms of self-help to see them through. George Shaw, of Elfin Bay acquired the neighbouring Greenstone cattle run in 1929 to provide

<sup>53</sup> Otago Land Board Minute, 11 April 1930; PR 1931 Vol. 1 Ben Lomond 1904-39; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>54</sup> Donald Reid & Co also shared in the loss, writing off £2,931 as a bad debt; Matheson Bros and Kennet, Greenvale, Donald Reid Unsecured Securities 1933-40, Box 1, (85/16), Reid Farmers Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>55</sup> Dunedin Office Manager's Report, 31/3/32, NMA Managers' Reports, 1928-32.

<sup>56</sup> Annie Shaw to CCL, Southland, 20 February 1931; 12 January 1932; 466/127; PRL 466 Elfin Bay.



another source of income and also packed out tourists visiting the Greenstone Valley. His wife, Annie Shaw, kept household bills down with the sale of eggs and butter.<sup>57</sup> Over the 1932/33 shearing season, in an effort to cut costs, the neighbouring stations of Kawarau Falls, Mt Aurum, Coronet Peak and Glencoe combined, in what was known as the “Big Run”, for mustering and shearing operations.<sup>58</sup> When Adam Hume, the lessee of Wyuna, died in 1931 the N.M.A. was satisfied to allow the young sons to carry on the property. Doing so would mean finding them in food, but Ritchie supposed it would be cheaper than installing a manager and the boys would, under the circumstances, get assistance from their neighbours.<sup>59</sup> In 1931 Harry Adams of Cainard cropped and sold sixty acres of barley on his run despite legislation prohibiting Crown pastoral leaseholders from growing cash crops. In some rather shrewd, if fallacious reasoning, Adams argued that since the Land Board did not have the power to accede to his request no objection would be raised by them if he cropped without permission!<sup>60</sup> Indeed with the grain realising over £500, helping to pay rent arrears and his sons’ wages, the Land Board chose to overlook this indiscretion. Further crops were taken off Cainard once restrictions on cropping on pastoral runs were temporarily lifted in June 1932.

### **Recovery and Rehabilitation**

Stations unburdened by mortgages, such as Walter Peak, Rees Valley, Closeburn and Cecil Peak, were by all appearances, able to cope with the downturn much better. Government relief in the form of rental remissions and the temporary lowering of interest rates by mortgagees was sufficient to tide these and other stations over until fine wool prices again became profitable. When the 1933-34 wool sales showed a marked improvement in fine wool prices hopes were raised that an end to the slump was in sight. The market, however, remained volatile for the rest of the decade. Prices fell by an average of forty-five percent in 1935 then recovered well in 1936. Wool reached highly profitable levels in 1937, with the gross return per bale averaging nearly £23, before falling sharply away in 1938 and 1939 with an average price of

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<sup>57</sup> AB Shaw to CCL, Southland, 8 February 1932; 466/129; Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Glencoe and other station information from G.T. Jardine 2/5/70, ‘Runs F-G’, Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I, Peter Chandler Research Papers, Hocken Library.

<sup>59</sup> GR Ritchie to Dunedin Branch, 16 July 1931, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1929-31, V. 4, 584.

<sup>60</sup> G.L. Sadd (Field Inspector) to CCL, 16 April 1932; 413/322; Ibid.

around £13-10/- per bale. Despite this volatility, most stations were able to just hold their own over the second half of the 1930s.

Yet, as already shown, for other properties, such as Mt Earnslaw, Lorne Peak, Greenvale, Cainard, Coronet Peak and Wyuna remissions were, at best, a stop-gap measure, and at worst, ineffective. These runs had absorbed too much capital and were overburdened. Reducing large arrears by revenue alone was a slow process and almost impossible while prices remained unstable. For their future viability and operation an adjustment of liabilities was essential. The manager of the N.M.A.'s Dunedin branch summed up the position:

It is now forcibly brought before our customers that production costs require adjustment in accordance with current ruling prices, so that at least clients are able to cover their outgoings. In some cases this can be done but we are sorry to say that there are numerous farmers who cannot do this for the reason that they are carrying too heavy a burden of liabilities.<sup>61</sup>

As Barrie MacDonald and David Thomson have shown, by 1934 'the government was considering ways of restoring the relationship between mortgagors and mortgagees to normality, and reorganising farm finance to provide long-term loans to replace the current preponderance of five-year mortgages'.<sup>62</sup> Along with the creation of the State Advances Corporation to provide farm and urban finance, the main mechanism to achieve this was the 1936 Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act, designed to provide for an immediate and final adjustment of mortgage liabilities. This was applicable to capital and to interest as well as outstanding rents. Under this act fifty-two pastoral licensees in Otago had adjustments made, remitting £12,347, and annual rentals were reduced by £1,337.<sup>63</sup> At least six pastoral lessees from the Wakatipu applied for a readjustment of liabilities.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Wyuna and Ben

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<sup>61</sup> N.M.A. Dunedin Branch Manager's Report, 31/3/1931; NMA Managers' Reports 1928-1932, Box 276.

<sup>62</sup> Barry MacDonald and David Thomson, 'Mortgage Relief, Farm Finance, and Rural Depression in New Zealand in the 1930s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, (21:2, 1998), 238.

<sup>63</sup> Adjustments Under the Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act 1936, DAAK/D84/71d 3/438; Sheep Farming Commission 1939-1949, DAAK/D84/71d 3/438; ANZ/D.

<sup>64</sup> These were mainly in relation to outstanding mortgage payments and interest rates rather than an attempt to obtain a reduction in rent.

Lomond Stations voluntary adjustments were effected, the Adjustment Commissions made rulings on The Branches and Mt Earnslaw, while the application from McLean and Bremner of Coronet Peak Station was withdrawn.<sup>65</sup>

It appears most applications were filed on account of overcapitalisation. The Branches Station, owned by William Stewart Reid since 1919, was one such case. The run was bought for £8,944, with Donald Reid and Co paying £4,800 leaving the balance on first mortgage to the vendor. Between 1919 and 1936, W.S. Reid paid interest to Donald Reid of approximately £9,090, slightly greater than the amount paid for the run. The same company handled nearly all produce from the run, and collected commission, over those seventeen years. Reid's debit account with Donald Reid in 1936 was £9,448. In front of the Adjustment Commission, Reid painted a grim picture of his experience in high country farming. During his ownership of the run he had bought sheep to the value of £5,383; paid out £195 in bounty for 1,300 kea beaks; he had not effected any improvements on the run since 1926; his daughter and son had assisted him on the run for five and four years respectively, without any remuneration; and for the year 1935-36 the whole family had drawn just £68 for personal expenses.<sup>66</sup>

For those who did not go through the Mortgage Adjustment Commission, the other option available to struggling runholders in order to obtain a reduction in rental was to apply for a revaluation of their run under Section 277 of the 1924 Land Act. Few, however, found satisfaction with this process, as most revaluations recommended a rental only slightly below current rates. In 1936 Harry Adams, who had paid no rent since late 1934, applied for a revaluation of his Cainard run. Although the Revaluation Committee's report noted that that the property had a generally southerly aspect, two-thirds of the run was under permanent snow in winter and mustering the country was difficult, a reduction of just £60 on the current rental of £450 per annum was recommended.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Otago Adjustment Commission Register of Applications for Adjustment Volume 1, folio 115: DAAC/D256/1061a 1, ANZ/D; Mortgagors' Adjustment Commission, Otago District Register Nos. 1291-1692; DAAC/D437/654 5, ANZ/D.

<sup>66</sup> Evidence of W.S. Reid in Support of his Application for Mortgage Adjustment; DAAC/D135/32 Applications, No 1500-1560; Application 1505: W.S. Reid. ANZ/D.

<sup>67</sup> Report of Revaluation Committee on Cainard; 418/436; PRL 413 v. 2 Cainard; Harry Adams and the Crown eventually affected a voluntary settlement of £325 per annum when Adams signalled his



Mustering Gang on Coronet Peak Station, 1926. Runholder, J.W. McLean front right.

Original: S. Herbison  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/004, Hocken Library

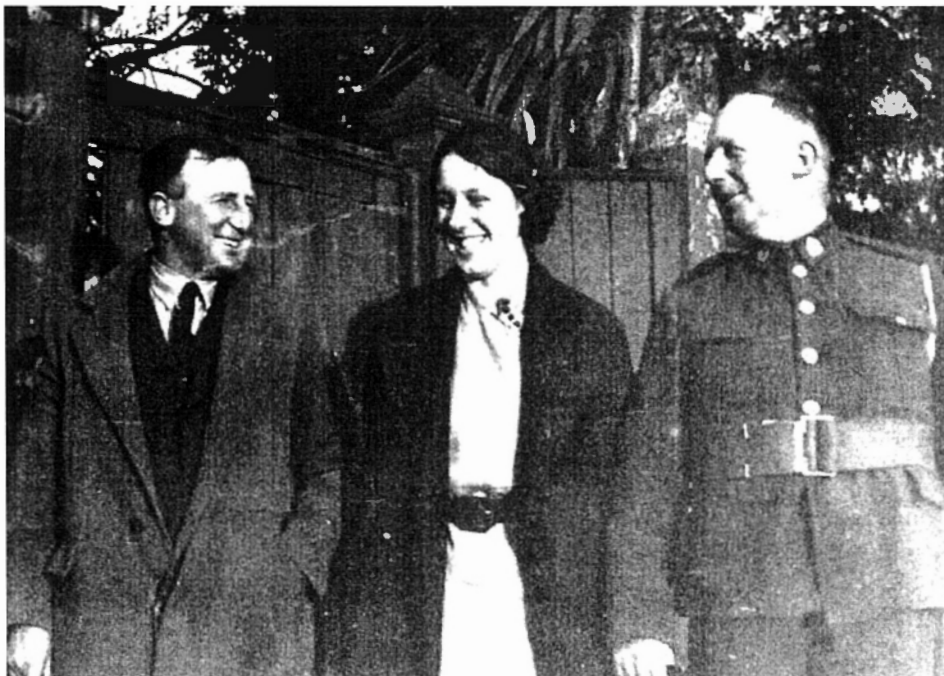


Fig. (4.5)

William C. McLean (left) and James W. McLean (right), Coronet Peak Station.

Original: F. Johnson  
 Peter Chandler Research Papers  
 MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

Financial relief was only one part of a broader adjustment to the conditions of the 1930s. Some runholders were also forced to reconsider the most effective methods of farming the high country. The abandonment of Molesworth Station, the largest pastoral holding in the high country, in 1937 due to rising costs and rabbit infestation had raised the spectre of other failures on isolated backcountry runs. W.S. Reid of The Branches also faced this possibility. In 1937, unable to obtain relief or to buy sheep, and hampered by labour difficulties, kea depredations and the excessive cost of access and transport, Reid sold the station's entire sheep flock and re-introduced cattle onto the run.<sup>68</sup> Although many stations carried a limited number of cattle, the extensive running of cattle in the Wakatipu high country was restricted to the long and grassy alpine flats, such as those in the Shotover headwaters and the Greenstone, and Routeburn valleys. At least two other experiments with replacing sheep with cattle in the region during the 1930s and 1940s failed.<sup>69</sup>

On Lorne Peak a change of sheep breed and ownership was seen as desirable. When revaluing the run, the Special Committee considered the Lorne Peak flock too light woolled, 'somewhat weedy' and 'below the standard which might be expected on a run of this class'.<sup>70</sup> On Greenvale Station a similar debate ensued between Donald Reid & Co. and the Commissioner of Crown Lands, regarding the future of the run. After better wool prices in the 1933-4 season produced a return only sufficient to meet one year's rent and interest, Donald Reid concluded that 'it must almost appear an absolute impossibility for the returns from this run to ever be sufficient to more than carry on and meet current expenses, let alone meet the arrears of rent that have accumulated'.<sup>71</sup> The 1923 subdivision of Greenvale had taken away a considerable area of ewe country and even growing large amounts of winter-feed was not enough

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intention to take the matter to the Adjustment Commission. The Land Board was fearful of taking the case to the Commission, 'as there is apparently little doubt that the main guide to a decision will be the antecedent history of the run'.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The Branches Station, with its long river flats at the headwaters of the Shotover River, had a history of cattle rearing. Edward Monson ran mainly cattle on this run from the 1890s to 1911 when it was converted into a wool growing property.

<sup>69</sup> D.G. Jardine Evidence, Henry John Wardell: Papers Relating to the Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry - Evidence of the High Country Committee V. 10, 13J-4. Generally, however, the number of beef cattle per 100 sheep shorn in Lake County rose from 2.09 to 2.71 between 1930 and 1944 - *Statistical Review of the Sheep Farming Industry in New Zealand, Volume II*, 277.

<sup>70</sup> Report of the Special Committee on Lorne Peak; 491/165; PRL518 323b.

<sup>71</sup> Donald Reid & Co. to CCL, Southland, 29 November 1934; 412/221; PRL 490 Greenvale.

to generate a natural increase sufficient to maintain the flock.<sup>72</sup> The best course of action, Donald Reid advised, would be to convert the property into a wether run.<sup>73</sup> The Southland Commissioner disagreed, citing the general management of the run as the chief problem and turning Greenvale into a wether run would be a 'retrograde step' and sufficient ewes, at least to provide stock replacements must be carried. Like Lorne Peak, the 'cross-bred' sheep, was considered ill suited to the country. The best solution, the Commissioner argued, was for a move into a finer woolled sheep, coupled with a change of ownership.<sup>74</sup>

The future of Elfin Bay Station was another question that had to be faced by the Crown and the lessees. By the late 1930s the position on Elfin Bay had deteriorated still further. After the 1936 season had produced only a small surplus, the Commissioner informed the other parties that the sharing arrangement would not be renewed and was 'not prepared to allow the position to drift any further'.<sup>75</sup> Likewise the Dunedin manager of the N.M.A. was 'doubtful of [G.H. Shaw] being able to carry on'.<sup>76</sup> The Crown made further rent remittances in 1938 and Annie Shaw continued to cite hardship, informing the Commissioner that she had taken the children from school even though the Government allowed 7/6 per week per child.<sup>77</sup> The Valuation Committee inspecting Elfin Bay in 1940 reached a dismal, yet obvious, conclusion that 'the run is not an economic proposition, even taking into account the cattle run held by Mr Shaw'. Unlike other runs in the area, with ample high summer country but limited winter land, Elfin Bay had little of either. Stock could not be fully taken off the lower country in summer so as to spell the winter blocks. The limited area of light, flat land that might be cultivated was rendered nearly worthless owing to the high cost of freighting manure. The Committee optimistically placed the carrying capacity at 3,100 Merino sheep; George Shaw thought a figure of 2,000 was more accurate.<sup>78</sup> Given that 'the run falls far short of what might be regarded as an economic unit' and

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<sup>72</sup> Donald Reid & Co. to Minister of Lands, 6 April 1935; 412/231; PRL 490 Greenvale.

<sup>73</sup> Donald Reid & Co. to CCL, Southland, 29 November 1934; 412/221; PRL 490 Greenvale.

<sup>74</sup> CCL, Southland to Donald Reid & Co., 1 December 1934; 412/222; PRL 490 Greenvale.

<sup>75</sup> CCL, Southland to NMA, 8 April 1936; DABW/18837/D86/110f, PRL 512 Elfin Bay 1933-1955; ANZ/D.

<sup>76</sup> Dunedin Office Manager's Report, 31/3/37; NMA Managers' Reports, 1932-1939, Box 277, (UN-028), NMA Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>77</sup> CCL, Southland to Annie Shaw, 15 August 1938; 466/278; Annie Shaw to CCL, 20 October 1938; 466/279; PRL 512 Elfin Bay.

<sup>78</sup> Throughout the 1930s Elfin Bay carried an average of 2,153 sheep; George Shaw to CCL, Southland 26 March 1941; 466/354; PRL 512 Elfin Bay.

recognising 'the futility of attempting to sustain a rent on a productive basis' a rental of £50 (£25 less than the current rent) was recommended.<sup>79</sup>

The fall of wool prices to near depression levels in 1939 was exacerbated by one of the worst snowfalls experienced in the Wakatipu high country during the twentieth century. The Mackenzies considered the 1939 snowstorm as the worst they had seen: 'in any ordinary severe winter we would have practically escaped any loss, but the type of snow storm of last winter is the first of the kind we have experienced since we settled here in 1881'. On Walter Peak the blizzard raged continuously for eight days burying sheep where they stood. Fences across the run were 'flattened from end to end'. Instances of heavy stock losses abounded: 1,000 out of 1,300 hoggets on low sunny faces were lost; another valley had 390 ewes and 20 new rams – only 90 ewes and 9 rams were recovered; 300 ewes were lost in a snow slide. Total losses on Walter Peak were estimated to be between 5,000 and 7,000 sheep, the lambing shortage to be between 1,500 and 2,000 and the clip to be at least 100 bales lighter.<sup>80</sup> Similar losses of station flocks, ranging from twenty to thirty per cent, were reported across the Wakatipu high country. Lake County's 1940 sheep returns showed a decline of 36,000 from the previous year, the majority coming from the high country. Lambing percentages were generally cut in half and there was little money available to purchase replacements.

The 1939 winter, the effect of which was probably just as great psychologically as financially, led to another round of requests for Crown assistance. James Burnett summed up the frustration among the high country men: 'We have had to reduce our staff, both permanent, casual and domestic and as a result it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with routine work and almost impossible to handle rabbiting and the noxious weed question'. Burnett requested a remission of rent for two years arguing it was 'absolutely necessary to pull this station through after the severe losses suffered last winter' and warned that 'there is a very real chance of this high country run going out of production unless the relief asked for is granted'.<sup>81</sup> The threat of abandonment was a common refrain among runholders. Ernest Bremner of Coronet Peak Station

<sup>79</sup> CCL, Southland to Mr J Mee, Supervising Field Inspector, Lands and Survey Department Dunedin, 17 July 1940; 466/337; PRL 512 Elfin Bay.

<sup>80</sup> H. Mackenzie and Sons to CCL, Southland, November 1939; 420/92; PRL 522 Walter Peak.

<sup>81</sup> James Burnett to CCL, Southland, 28 August 1940; 403/135; PRL 403, Halfway Bay.

applied for a rental revaluation in 1939, stating that 'financially the position of this station is hopeless and it is only by the good will of the principal mortgagees and the local creditors ... that I am able to carry on'. Like Burnett he too warned that 'at the present rate of financial retrogression this property will be abandoned in a few years to the mercy of keas, briars, St John's Wort and goats, and the country will become useless for the future'.<sup>82</sup> Up until the slump of 1930, Walter Peak Station had according to its owners 'paid very well', the Mackenzies being able to accommodate a reserve fund of £25,000. By 1940, the property had absorbed the reserve and had gone into debt to the extent of £12,000. When the N.Z.L.M.A. tried to secure a mortgage over the stock and property and the Mackenzies refused, they found the Company unwilling to do further business.<sup>83</sup> By 1940 W.P. McDonald of Ben Lomond Station was also considering his position. With the low price of wool and high cost of labour McDonald was prepared to dispose of the high and difficult Mt Gilbert block (Run 12) as a wether run and continue with the Ben Lomond block (Run 10) as a ewe proposition.<sup>84</sup>

Also thinking of selling were the Adams' of Cainard Station. The 1939 winter saw only 6,600 sheep mustered out of the 9,200 turned out and 900 lambs marked, compared with 1,800 the previous year. By 1941, the flock was still well below capacity with replacements scarce or too expensive.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand stock losses were offset by the sale of grain and produce. Between 1940 and 1944, the Adams' - sometimes legally, sometimes illegally - harvested fescue, producing fair returns and placing the finances of the station on a much sounder footing. Yet Cainard, as a high country pastoral lease, was intended to be a strictly wool growing proposition, not a mixed agricultural estate. In this respect Cainard's prospects were less promising. The Land Board realised that by 1941 the capital flock on Cainard had been reduced by 1,554 and the credit in the Adams' account with the N.M.A. would be absorbed in replacing lost stock. With wool selling at 10d per lb. in 1938 the station was

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<sup>82</sup> E.R. Bremner to CCL, Otago, 14 April 1939; Folio 135; PR 1853 Coronet Peak Vol. 1, 1910-31; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>83</sup> H. Mackenzie and Sons to CCL, Southland, 26 November 1939; 420/95; PRL 522, Walter Peak.

<sup>84</sup> W.P. McDonald to CCL, Otago, 17 September 1940; Folio 209; PR 1931 Ben Lomond Vol. 2.

<sup>85</sup> CCL, Southland to USL, 15/8/41; 413/591; PRL 413 v. 2 Cainard.





Snow on the Kingston to Fairlight Railway, 1939.  
Looking west across Allen Flat towards Greenvale and Cainard Stations.



Fig. (4.6)

Snow on the Fairlight Railway line, 1939.  
The 1939 blizzard was one of the worst snowfalls of the twentieth century.

Originals: J.W. Adams, D. Matheson  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

considered worthless. As one of the Adams sons said, there is 'no use carrying on for years and years and getting nothing out of it'.<sup>86</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The uncertainty facing runholders at the end of the 1930s were much the same as those at the start of the decade. Increasingly, owning a high country run was a financial liability rather than an asset. As this chapter has illustrated the economic depression had an uneven impact on the Wakatipu pastoralist. While all whose livelihoods depended on the income from wool found it tough, for some the fall in prices was a storm to be weathered before regaining their position. For others the Depression, along with climatic adversity, placed them in a position they would struggle or fail to recover from. For these runholders the rehabilitation of station finances was a slow and sometimes futile exercise. The level of mortgage indebtedness on some stations was too great for the high country to bear. The Depression also brought to the surface some of the underlying weaknesses of not only farm finance but also the economic marginality of high country farming when a fall of even a few pence in the price of wool, in which almost all the stations depended on as the sole source of income, could immobilise the farmer. Most blamed the increasing and unabated costs of production, in particular labour and transport, for squeezing their profit margins to unbearable levels. The logical consequence of this was to bring into question current modes of pastoralism both in terms of whether wool growing was viable or what ratio and breed of sheep should be carried. The winter of 1939 only delayed recovery and highlighted the slow but steady decline of some pastoral properties. The second wool commandeer introduced some stability into prices, albeit at a lower level than woolgrowers liked. The Second World War also interrupted what was at the time the largest ever survey taken of the New Zealand sheep industry. It was in this forum, that concluded in the late 1940s, that many of the problems highlighted by the 1930s and the ongoing legacies of that decade, would be aired and debated by runholders, officials and politicians and eventually lead to the thorough overhauling of the pastoral leasehold tenure.

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<sup>86</sup> Land Board Meeting 10/3/38; 494/488; PRL 413 v. 2 Cainard.



**Fig. (4.7)**

Branches Flat, Upper Shotover.

Part of the rugged The Branches Station in the Shotover Headwaters. The wide grassy valleys made it particularly suitable for running cattle.

Photo: Peter Chandler  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library



William Sinclair Reid, The Branches Station, 1919-1946.  
The run was carried on by his estate until its sale in 1955.



**Fig. (5.1)**

The Branches wool on Packhorses.

This remained the only way of transporting wool out of this isolated run for much of the twentieth century. Eight to ten horses were used with 120lbs of wool loaded on each side.

Original: A.L. Reid  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

## CHAPTER FIVE

**‘The least significant part of a decadent system’?****The High Country at a Crossroads: The 1940s**


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The mood of the high country farmer in the late 1930s and most of the 1940s was one of apprehension. Wartime wool prices were fixed at a depressed level, hindering the process of recovery from the 1930s depression and the 1939 winter. Some of the environmental consequences of the previous decade of inefficient management and neglected maintenance came to bear. Runholders feared they were in danger of becoming marginalized in a diversifying economy where the pastoral sector might occupy a less prominent position. As David McLeod, a contemporary runholder said, pastoralists might in the future ‘be henceforth the last resort of the most inefficient labour, the worst served by ever increasing amenities, political outcasts too unimportant to be protected’.<sup>1</sup> In response, runholders became more united in collective action to stave off the perceived threats and challenges to their livelihoods. It saw the formation of the High Country Committee in 1940 and the broader amalgamation of primary producers to form Federated Farmers in 1944. Runholder apprehension was paralleled with the rise of the soil conservationist movement and widespread concern over erosion in New Zealand’s high country. The appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the sheep-industry in 1947 was welcomed by runholders. The evidence provided to the Commission and its report, presented in 1949, dealt with the issues facing pastoralism and the particular problems faced by runholders in the Wakatipu over the previous past decade or more. The passing of the 1948 Land Act, which thoroughly revised the pastoral tenure, will conclude this chapter. Brief mention will be made of its features and its implications for the future of the high country farmer.

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<sup>1</sup> David McLeod, ‘The Condition of the Sheep Farming Industry in New Zealand’, *New Zealand Geographer*, 6, no. 1, (April 1950), 72.

Following another precipitous fall in fine wool prices in 1939, James Begg, president of the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union, painted a bleak picture of the state of high country farming.

From country carrying fine wool sheep and from some areas of high country the year's returns have been disastrous. Should these conditions continue, it will almost certainly mean that much of the high country that has been profitably occupied in the past will be abandoned. Much of this country has no value today. If the tenants' fencing, buildings and stock were removed from many of these runs, they could not be re-let, as no one would face the cost of replacing the necessary improvements at present day costs.<sup>2</sup>

The appointment of the 1939 Sheep-Farming Commission offered some hope and it was suggested that in the preparation of evidence the economic position of the sheep industry be the primary focus. The war, however, interrupted the Commission's work and no evidence was collected from the South Island. The Commission's report, submitted in 1940, was in largely general terms 'embodying its conclusions and recommendations regarding the long-range aspects of those matters included in its Order of Reference.'<sup>3</sup> This pre-war Sheep-Farming Commission is often overlooked in comparison with the post war Royal Commission into the Sheep-Farming Industry, but was nevertheless notable for several recommendations as to pastoral occupation.

First and by way of a Land Utilization Council a fourfold classification of deteriorated land was recommended. This ranged from Type I deterioration which can be 'obviated by means which are directly profitable and which can be financed by the occupier of the land' to Type IV deterioration which 'following reclamation would not be sufficient either to meet interest charges or to provide a reasonable labour and management reward'.<sup>4</sup> As Kevin O'Connor notes, 'in proposing a basis for classification of land, the 1939 Commission was noteworthy in recognising that other land uses had a place'.<sup>5</sup> On those lands classified as Type IV alternatives to sheep farming might include 'recreational, forestry, or protective purposes'. The question of

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<sup>2</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report 30/4/39, O&S SIUE Minute Book 1911-41.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Sheep-Farming Industry Commission, 1940, *AJHR*, H-29A, 1940, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, 'The Influence of Science on the use of Tussock Grasslands', 59.

soil conservation became an important issue during the 1940s, with the advocacy of Lance McCaskill and writings of Kenneth Cumberland elevating it into the public consciousness.<sup>6</sup> The passing of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act in 1941, ‘under a certain amount of pressure and lobbying’, and the establishment of regional Catchment Boards was viewed with great alarm by runholders. Questions were raised as to what powers the authorities had, what they could compel the occupier to do and what compensation runholders were entitled to receive and from whom as a result of Catchment Board orders. The High Country Committee expressed their fears in evidence submitted to the 1949 Commission:

A tremendous blow to confidence in the future of the High Country was the passing of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act. This Committee believes that such an Act was necessary and that a genuine endeavor was made to produce the best possible administration. However, there was one omission, which rendered it disastrous. No provision was made in the Act for dealing with its effect on the occupiers of land.<sup>7</sup>

The second notable feature of the 1939 report, which found its way into legislation, was the insertion of a good husbandry clause into pastoral licenses. As a means to guard against overstocking, a maximum winter carrying capacity, expressed in terms of dry sheep, was set on each run as licenses came up for renewal. Similar stock limitation measures had been proposed as early as 1905 in the final report of the Crown Lands Commission.<sup>8</sup> Leaseholders were consulted as to what a fair average winter stock capacity would be. Although runholders claimed to have no objection to such a clause they were dismissive of its form. It was claimed that good farmers, who practiced good husbandry and improved their holdings during their tenancy faced a rental increase at the end of their lease, while poor farmers who through bad management allowed their run to deteriorate found their rental decreased when their lease was renewed. For this reason, the High Country Committee believed that ‘good

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<sup>6</sup> See Lance W. McCaskill, *Hold This Land: A History of Soil Conservation in New Zealand*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1973); Kenneth Cumberland, *Soil Erosion in New Zealand: a geographic reconnaissance*, (Wellington: Soil Conservation & Rivers Control Council, 1944).

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of the High Country Committee, First Session on 19 November 1947; Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, Evidence of the High Country Committee, Volume 2; H.J. Wardell: Papers Relating to the Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, (MS-1755), Hocken Library.

<sup>8</sup> ‘1905 Crown Lands: Report of the Royal Commission on Land Tenure’, *AJHR*, C-4, 1905, xxv.



husbandry, which is of vital importance to the high country, should not be enforced but rather encouraged and rewarded'.<sup>9</sup> The 1949 Commission wholeheartedly agreed and called for the clause to be re-written.<sup>10</sup>

For the first half of the decade, the economics of high country runholding were closely entwined with the war effort. The agreed commandeered average price for New Zealand wool of 12¼d per lb. was better than the three-season average price and comparatively better than the price secured by Australia.<sup>11</sup> Woolgrowers still grumbled however, noting that the average price during World War One was 15½d, and with costs having risen over the inter-war years, 'farmers who depend on wool as their principal source of income are in a very unenviable position'.<sup>12</sup> The commandeered price was subject to yearly review and in 1942, was increased by fifteen per cent, alleviating some of the grower discontent. In the Wakatipu however, and one assumes the wider Otago high country, dissatisfaction remained. W.P. McDonald of Ben Lomond Station had spoken at the 1943 AGM of the Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Union on the disparity between cross-bred and high country wools, contending that the price for the latter was too low to warrant the high wages cost.<sup>13</sup> Similar discussions were held amongst Canterbury runholders.<sup>14</sup> Yet despite assurances that the matter would be brought before the High Country Committee of the Sheepowners' Federation, there was disappointment over the general lack of support for the Wakatipu cause. Unperturbed, the Wakatipu committee forwarded a resolution and an eight-point memorandum, drawn up the previous year, to the 1944 AGM of the parent body:

We, a representative body of high country men, deplore the treatment we have received in relation to the prices listed for fine wools from count 50 upwards,

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence of the High Country Committee, Second Session on 19 November 1947, H.J. Wardell: Papers, Vol. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Commission to Inquire Into and Report Upon The Sheep-Farming Industry in New Zealand: Report (Wellington: Government Printer, 1949), 76.

<sup>11</sup> Carter and MacGibbon, *Wool*, 98-99.

<sup>12</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report 30/4/41, O&S SIUE Minute Book 1911-1941.

<sup>13</sup> O&S SIUE AGM, 8 June 1943, O&S SIUE Minute Book 1942-1955, New Zealand Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers, Otago & Southland Branch: Records (MS-1039/5), Hocken Library; David McLeod, a member of the High Country Committee claims that in 1942, 'New Zealand authorities stole a very small amount from the crossbred producers to add several pence a lb to the returns of the Merino and other fine woolgrowers.' Of course the matter was never discussed publicly.

<sup>14</sup> David McLeod, 'The High Country Committee – an early history', *Review Journal of the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Institute*, 31, (1975), 81.



more especially for the average and inferior types, in the schedule of wool prices. We feel that if we do not receive an increase which is due to us the high country business will become hopelessly uneconomic if it has not already become so.<sup>15</sup>

The matter was once again received favourably at a regional level and this time nationally as well. The Sheepowners' Federation President, Mr Grigg, was appointed 'chief instigator of all necessary steps to bring the matter conclusively to the government's notice'.<sup>16</sup> It appears, however, that the issue was not satisfactorily resolved before the British Government called for a conference to deal with the huge wartime stockpile of wool and the resumption of the open auction system in the 1946/47 season.

The other significant consequence of the war for the high country was the exacerbation of a serious shortage of pastoral labour. Wartime mobilization turned an already diminished labour force into an acute shortage. For several years previous, the industrialising urban centres had been drawing young men and families away from the high country with the prospect of higher wages, shorter hours, more attractive working conditions, a higher standard of housing, better education and urban amenities. Although farming was never made an official essential wartime industry, assurances were given that necessary men would be retained in the sector. Runholders could also appeal against enlistment but they knew that there was little they could do to keep men from leaving. For instance, John Mackenzie's head shepherd, a man very difficult to replace, was called up for service and refused to allow an appeal to be made on his behalf.<sup>17</sup> As the labour shortage became critical, representations were, at various times, made to government ministers for the exemption of high country labourers from war service. These only had limited success. In 1941, Mr Nicholson, the secretary of the Sheepowners' Federation, informed members that the exemption of high country musterers was practically assured. Yet, in 1945, the Minister of National Service was again called upon to refrain from mobilising high country

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<sup>15</sup> Special Meeting of WSOU, 25 June 1943, WSOU Minute Book, 117-118.

<sup>16</sup> Meeting of WSOU, 31 July 1944, WSOU Minute Book., 125-126.

<sup>17</sup> O&S SIUE Annual Report and AGM, 4 June 1941, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1911-1941.

musterers, and a request was made that musterers already in camp be 'released when required'.<sup>18</sup>

Shearing time was perhaps the most difficult for runholders. W.P. McDonald of Ben Lomond Station characterized shearing on high country stations as 'a veritable nightmare' during the 1940s.<sup>19</sup> Shearers, and in particular efficient shearers, were scarce. George Shaw of Elfin Bay hired two men for the 1940-41 shearing season but discovered they could only shear seventy-five sheep a day between them!<sup>20</sup> Betty Shaw, recalling her days as a Land Girl on her father's station, could blade shear up to ninety sheep per day.<sup>21</sup> To the woolgrowers' advantage however, sliding scale agreements for shearing rates were once again continued throughout the 1940s and were excluded from the effect of existing and future orders made by the Arbitration Court under the Rates of Wages Emergency Regulations.<sup>22</sup> Many farmers, however, particularly those in the backcountry, continued to pay over and above the award rate to secure shearers. The Wakatipu Sheepowners' Union attempted in 1944 to get the provincial body to agree on a maximum fixed price for shearing but the Union Executive felt that doing so 'would create a dangerous precedent and might create difficulties when negotiating a new award'.<sup>23</sup>

Being short-staffed meant that in addition to working their own properties, many runholders assisted neighbours during busy times of the year. Consequently, non-essential tasks and maintenance were accorded less attention. On Mt Creighton Station, with one working partner on active service and labour scarce, fences and tracks through the bluff-bound faces had badly deteriorated by the mid-1940s, posing difficulties for stock management.<sup>24</sup> Unchecked, rabbits once again began to proliferate in the high country, and particularly on winter grazing blocks. Mt Earnslaw and Wyuna were two runs where rabbit infestation on the winter country was severe.

<sup>18</sup> O&S SIUE AGM 6 June 1945, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1942-1955.

<sup>19</sup> W.P. McDonald Evidence, H.J. Wardell: Papers relating particularly to Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, Volume 10, 12-D-4

<sup>20</sup> Annie Shaw to CCL, Southland, 29 January 1941; 466/349; PRL 512 Elfin Bay.

<sup>21</sup> Dianne Bardsley, *The Land Girls: In a Man's World 1939-1946*, (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2000), 46; In an effort to attract young men to take up job, shearing classes were held in Roxburgh in 1941 for trainees and further classes were held throughout Central Otago.

<sup>22</sup> O&S SIUE AGM 8 June 1943, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1942-1955.

<sup>23</sup> Meeting of WSOU, 25 February 1944, WSOU Minute Book, 122; O&S SIUE AGM 7 June 1944, O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1942-1955.

<sup>24</sup> I.L. Key to CCL, Otago, 8 October 1945; Folio 142; P107, Mt Creighton, 1936-1961.



**Fig. (5.2)**

Ivan Lewis Key, Mt Creighton Station, 1958

William Ashley and Ivan Lewis Key bought Mt Creighton Station in partnership in 1936.  
Ivan bought out his brother's half-share in the run in 1947.

Photo: Peter Chandler  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

The introduction of a new Rabbit Nuisance Act in 1947 established a national Rabbit Destruction Board, contiguous regional rabbit boards, and the implementation of what was known as the 'killer policy'.<sup>25</sup> While being effective for many years, in some districts, rabbit boards took several years to start up and a lack of manpower and finance also initially limited their operations. Goat numbers also increased considerably, especially on the Skippers runs, Mt Aurum and The Branches. In 1946 over 16,000 goats were killed in the Wakatipu, and nearly 18,000 the following year.<sup>26</sup> Keas continued to periodically prey on stock and draw requests for eradication assistance.<sup>27</sup> In 1944, at the request of the Lake County Council, twenty-seven station owners submitted a 'conservative estimate' that 6,625 sheep were lost through kea attacks annually, at a cost of £245 to each runholder.<sup>28</sup>

Just as concerning was the rapid spread of noxious weeds, particularly sweetbriar and St Johns Wort, throughout pastoral country.<sup>29</sup> Like rabbits, weeds normally afflicted valuable winter country, thus reducing overall carrying capacities. On Mt Creighton Station, Ivan Key noticed that Manuka and St Johns Wort were rapidly spreading over the lower winter country.<sup>30</sup> The St John's Wort problem was particularly severe, and unchecked, on Mt Aurum and The Branches. It also spread across the lake to Halfway Bay, Cecil Peak and Cainard where it had not been a problem previously but now impossible to eradicate without the necessary manpower.<sup>31</sup>

For those fortunate enough to possess it family labour helped fill the breach. In some instances it was the female members of families who took up the slack. Reta and Betty Groves, who joined the Land Service in the early 1940s, assumed greater responsibility on their father's Routeburn Station during the war years. It must be noted however that since the first settlement of the high country, all members of runholding families in these isolated alpine valleys contributed to their largely self-sufficient existence. It was the work normally done by hired labour, such as mustering

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas D. Isern, 'Companions, Stowaways, Imperialists, Invaders: Pests and Weeds in New Zealand', in *Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, 238-239.

<sup>26</sup> Doug Rowe Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 10, 12Z.1.

<sup>27</sup> O&S SIUE AGM, 8 June 1943; O&S SIUE Minute Book, 1942-55.

<sup>28</sup> E.R. Hopwood Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 10, 13E-5.

<sup>29</sup> Report of the Otago Commissioner of Crown Lands, *AJHR*, C-1, 1941, 38; C-1, 8, 1943.

<sup>30</sup> IL Key to CCL, Otago, 8 October 1945; P 107 Mt Creighton 1936-1961; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Burnett Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 10.

and shearing, which girls and women took over as male labourers became scarce.<sup>32</sup> Across the Greenstone River, Betty Shaw, along with her sister, Elfin, and their father were responsible for all the station work on Elfin Bay during the war. Whereas gangs still carried out shearing on Elfin Bay, assisted by the Shaw girls, the Grove girls and their father did all the shearing on Routeburn Station.

The ability of prospective runholders to provide labour through their family became an important asset when purchasing a pastoral run from the 1940s. When Bill Elliot of Birchdale Station sold out to A.F. Sutherland in 1946, the N.M.A. Company noted that 'the personal element which is of very great importance in these backcountry propositions, is in this case excellent, the purchaser having two sons available for working, so that their labour is practically assured within the family'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, during the sale of Mt Earnslaw Station in 1947 to the Thompson brothers it was noted that there would be 'a good deal of labour strength on the property'.<sup>34</sup> The mechanisation of some farm work was another way of offsetting the labour shortage. The use of tractors to replace horse teams for cultivation, particularly from the late 1940s as farm incomes improved, was the most common acquisition.

The most evident consequence of the labour shortage was a lack of attention to sheep flocks, and when coupled with rabbit and weed problems, reduced productivity was the ultimate result. Falling stock numbers and the deterioration of station plant and the environment were the most visible signs. Alex Wearing characterised the 1930s and 1940s as 'a period of pastoral retreat, land retirement, destocking and land surrender'.<sup>35</sup> Kevin O'Connor suggests that by the early 1950s the low point in pastoral production in the South Island high country had been reached.<sup>36</sup> Walter Peak Station, with a carrying capacity of approximately 35,000 sheep, had reduced its flock to less than 20,000 by the end of the 1940s due to the absence of experienced musterers and the advancing age of the Mackenzie brothers.<sup>37</sup> Doug Rowe of Coronet

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<sup>32</sup> Bardsley, *The Land Girls*, 43-44.

<sup>33</sup> Inspector to Dunedin Manager, 15 February 1946; N.M.A. Correspondence, Dunedin 1944-47, V. 11, Box 67, NMA Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>34</sup> Dunedin Manager to General Manager, 4 March 1947; NMA GM, Dunedin Inward Letters 1943-47, Box 152, NMA Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>35</sup> Wearing, 'Plants, People and Landscapes', 229.

<sup>36</sup> K.F. O'Connor, 'Changes in the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands', *Review, Journal of the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute*, no. 40, (1981), 47-48.

<sup>37</sup> CCL, Southland to USL, 14 March 1949; 420/193; PRL 522 Walter Peak.

Peak Station complained that winter losses had increased due to the summer country not being cleanly mustered through the lack of musterers.<sup>38</sup> In 1944, Dickson G. Jardine of Kawarau Falls Station sold off the half-bred flock due to an inability to maintain the figures under existing conditions. Again the labour shortage, in particular of experienced men, was the chief contributing factor in the sale. Winter losses had increased due to the 'infested condition of summer country, increased losses from keas and inability to provide the necessary standard of attention at important times such as tupping and lambing'.<sup>39</sup> Jardine's experiment to stock the more easily mustered country with a Romney flock did not work. When Kawarau Falls was subdivided between the Jardine brothers, Dickson retained the high country and reverted back to a half-bred flock, bought at 'an exceedingly high price'. Thereafter only the better portions of the high country were restocked, in order that it could be mustered with only four men, rather than seven over a three-week period as had previously been the custom.

Reflecting a general deterioration of the South Island high country industry, Merino and half-bred stock became increasingly difficult and expensive to obtain. Alexander Burnett told the Sheep Industry Commission in 1948 that he had been unable to restock his Halfway Bay run since the snowstorm of 1939. With a normal carrying capacity of 5,000-6,000 sheep, the flock had been bred back up to the 4,000 mark before the 1946 spring snows reduced it back to less than 3,000. Mt Creighton Station had carried an average flock of 8,000 sheep until 1940. Poor winters and springs and an inability to buy in stock had reduced that number down to 6,000 by 1946.<sup>40</sup> The market for surplus and aged sheep had also dried up. Whereas at one time around 300 surplus sheep were sold off Halfway Bay annually, the Burnetts now had to keep sheep until they died.<sup>41</sup> The Mackenzies also found themselves relying almost entirely on their wool clip as there were no fat lambs taken off the runs and old ewes were not worth selling owing to high freight charges.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Doug Rowe Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Dickson G. Jardine Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 10, 13J-4.

<sup>40</sup> J.M. McDonald Report on Mt Creighton, 23 July 1946; Folio 149; P 107, Mt Creighton 1936-1961; LINZ ChCh.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Burnett Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10.

<sup>42</sup> H Mackenzie and Sons to CCL, Southland, 9 March 1940; PRL 522 Walter Peak.

Whereas run management was adapted in various ways to remain sustainable in response to changing conditions, depressed wool prices, the lasting effects of the 1939 winter and increasing costs continued to render several pastoral holdings unprofitable and untenable. By 1942 the financial position of Lorne Peak Station had become too great to continue. Edward Blakely, the leaseholder of 323A had died in 1939, owing liabilities to the Bank of NSW and Wright Stephenson & Co, of over £17,000. The 1939 winter then killed approximately 2,500 sheep and reduced the wool clip by 50 bales. By 1942, outstanding rent amounted to over £2,000 and W.S. & Co had written off £1,000 from the Blakely account.<sup>43</sup> At this point, the Blakelys 'virtually abandoned the run' leaving it to the stock agent to find transferees. The run itself had gradually deteriorated over the previous twelve years. Donald and Duncan McPherson, the new lessees of Lorne Peak were only able to carry 7,000 sheep during the 1943 season. Not until the rabbit numbers were under control and winter-feed sown, could they hope to increase their flock to 8,000. The run's rated carrying capacity of 9,000 sheep was impossible 'until the country has had a good spell'.<sup>44</sup>

On Coronet Peak Station, a run capable of carrying up to 12,000 sheep, the flock had dwindled to fewer than 7,000 at the time of a mortgagee sale in 1940. Crown Ranger J.M. Macdonald commented that 'the shearing tally ... presents a sorry picture of just how this run has been handled, in fact there has been no real management over a period of years to my knowledge'.<sup>45</sup> Years of inefficient management had also taken its toll on Mt Aurum Station, which was taken over by Archie Macnicol in 1940 after being forfeit by the previous lessees. With a large proportion of old sheep on the run, particularly amongst the ewes, Macnicol was on the back foot from the beginning. Despite being 'hard-working and frugal', by 1948 Macnicol was considered to be in a hopeless position. Through heavy stock losses, the spread of St Johns Wort on the already insufficient winter country and very poor lambings (averaging just twenty-nine percent over the period) it was estimated that, despite purchasing over 500 sheep between 1945 and 1948, Macnicol was carrying 600 less sheep in 1948 than in 1940.

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<sup>43</sup> Wright Stephenson & Co to CCL, Southland, 15 May 1941; 492/177; PRL 519 Run 323a.

<sup>44</sup> McPherson Brothers to CCL Southland, 18 July 1943 518/215; PRL 519 Run 323a.

<sup>45</sup> J.M. Macdonald to CCL, Otago, 30 July 1940; Folio 169; PR 1853 Vol. 2, Coronet Peak Station 1932-40; LINZ ChCh.





**Fig. (5.3)**

Archie Macnicol, Mt Aurum Station, 1940-1956. Archie had worked as a musterer on Mt Aurum before taking over the run in 1940 following its forfeiture. The Macnicols remained on Mt Aurum until 1956.

Photo: Robin Smith Photography Limited  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

The Field Inspector imagined that 'it would appear as if the flock will become so poor in the next year or so that it will gradually diminish to practically nothing'.<sup>46</sup>

For runholders burdened with uneconomic holdings, a sale to the Government for ex-soldier rehabilitation purposes offered an opportunity to sell in a depressed market. The Crown, however, was extremely reticent about taking up Wakatipu pastoral runs for soldier settlement. Not only because of the bitter experience of returned soldier settlements after the First World War, but high country runs, particularly those in the Wakatipu were most unsuitable for subdivision. Greenvale Station and the Mount Nicholas block of Walter Peak Station were both offered for sale and rejected by the Southland Land Board. In the case of the Mackenzies, it was recognised that the offer of Mt Nicholas was 'made in an attempt to stave off the inevitable'.<sup>47</sup> The Mt Nicholas block was large, isolated, difficult to work and had suffered consistent stock losses over the previous twelve years. The Mackenzie brothers, now elderly men, were more than ever dependent on hired labour. When the future of Lorne Peak was undecided between 1942 and 1943, the Gore R.S.A. objected to any transfer of the runs and wanted them made available for ex-servicemen. The Land Board however totally rejected the idea, the Commissioner saying, 'Generally I should say that runs such as these in question, taking into account special local knowledge required and snow risk, are not suitable for acquisition by the Government for settlement by ex-servicemen or anyone else'.<sup>48</sup> Cainard Station was also offered for sale and was deemed suitable for selection by an ex-service man, but only one with a high country grading and on the basis of a minimum cash contribution of £4,000.<sup>49</sup> In the economic environment of the 1940s there were sufficient men with necessary experience but few with that sort of capital.

The Rehabilitation Boards and the State Advances Corporation seemingly shared this lack of confidence in the high country, often refusing to support men wanting to take up high country runholding. Douglas Rowe, President of the Wakatipu Branch of Federated Farmers and Secretary of the High Country Committee between 1949 and

<sup>46</sup> Field Inspector to CCL, Otago, 7 May 1948; PR 1852 Vol. 2, Mt Aurum.

<sup>47</sup> J.M. Macdonald to CCL, Southland, 21 March 1946; 420/142; PRL 522 Walter Peak.

<sup>48</sup> CCL, Southland to USL, 29 November 1943; 492/200; PRL 519 Run 323a.

<sup>49</sup> District Rehabilitation Officer to CCL, Southland, 7 April 1949; 413/736; PRL 413, Vol. 2 Cainard.

1970, expressed such doubts.<sup>50</sup> With regard to returned soldiers, Rowe believed that ‘there seems to be a different attitude today, and I think it is engendered by the way the Government is treating the high country. They don’t seem to be encouraging it. They are placing difficulties in the way of chaps who want to take on high country work’.<sup>51</sup> In one such case, William Elliot’s transfer of Birchdale Station to a returned serviceman was aborted when the Loan Board turned it down, ‘on account of the fact that they were not inclined to rehabilitate soldiers on back country runs as far back as this one’.<sup>52</sup> Likewise the sale of Mt Earnslaw Station in 1946 to two ex-service men possessing many years high country experience was not completed owing to the property being deemed as unsuitable for soldier settlement by the Rehabilitation Department. It was ironic that the following year a private sale of Mt Earnslaw was concluded by the N.M.A. to two brothers with much less experience and capital.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Loch Linnhe Station, on the south-eastern end of Lake Wakatipu was transferred in 1947 to William Lott, a returned soldier and State Advances Corporation client.

Even finding suitable transferees in the open market was difficult. The reality was that by the 1940s few with capital were prepared to risk it on high country properties. A partnership of three men related by marriage took up Coronet Peak in 1940, buying the 50,000 acre run for just £7,500 as a going concern.<sup>54</sup> None had any significant capital, two were only in their early 20s, but all, and in particular Douglas Rowe, were experienced high country men. Further north up the Skippers, Archie Macnicol, a shepherd in his mid-20s of lifetime experience but possessing no capital, took over a rundown Mt Aurum Station in 1940 after it had been forfeit by the previous tenant. Like others of his background, Macnicol was fulfilling an ambition to own and

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<sup>50</sup> Rowe himself had returned from the First World War and voluntarily entered into high country employment, working for Dickson Jardine on Birchwood, Glencoe and Kawarau Falls Stations. He rose to the position of head shepherd and then station manager, before taking up Coronet Peak Station in partnership between 1940 and 1948; McLeod, ‘The High Country Committee’, 79.

<sup>51</sup> D.R. Rowe Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 10, 12Z.1.

<sup>52</sup> Dunedin to General Manager, 15 February 1946; NMA GM, Dunedin Inward Letters 1943-47, Box 152, NMA Records.

<sup>53</sup> Dunedin to General Manager, 4 March 1947; NMA GM, Dunedin Inward Letters 1943-47, Box 152, NMA Records.

<sup>54</sup> The most senior partner was Douglas Rowe, aged 43, a long-time employee and manager for Dickson Jardine of Kawarau Falls and son-in-law of R.M. Paterson, formerly of Mt Aurum Station. The second was Alexander Paterson, aged 24, son of R.M. Paterson and Rowe’s brother-in-law. The third partner was William Glendinning Greive, aged 25, and a nephew of Doug Rowe.

manage his own high country property after many years of working on this and other high country stations.

The number of inter-family transfers once again began to increase during the 1940s as several runholders retired, and their sons, many of whom had returned from active service overseas, looked for farms of their own. Alexander Munro Burnett of Halfway Bay, a discharged serviceman, bought the neighbouring Cecil Peak Station from L.G.D Acland in 1948, while his brother, Arthur Thomas Burnett, took over Halfway Bay Station. Kawarau Falls was divided between the Jardine brothers in 1942; J.W. Adams took over Cainard from his father Harry in 1945; William Hume took up Wyuna Station from the family estate in 1947; and Routeburn Station was transferred from Huntly Groves to his son-in-law in 1949.

These new runholders were assisted by the return to the auction system for wool in 1947. It brought an immediate strengthening of wool prices, leaping from an average of 14d per lb. in 1946 to 20d per lb. in 1947.<sup>55</sup> The rise continued, culminating in the Korean War wool boom of 1950-51, where prices reached the unprecedented heights of 100d per lb. and in for some superfine Merino, nearly £1 for 1lb of wool. Yet even prior to the boom, the rise of just several pence per pound in the price of wool between 1946 and 1949, and favourable seasons, was able to markedly improve the position of many runs. William Hume's Wyuna Station exhibited a remarkable recovery. Hume was able to substantially reduce his overdraft, purchase a new tractor and reduce his mortgage.<sup>56</sup> The Adams of Cainard were also able to reduce their mortgage by £1,600.<sup>57</sup> Lloyd Ewing, who purchased the Motatapu block of Glencoe Station in 1946 in partnership with his brother-in-law, was able to repay all liabilities by 1950.

For the stock agents most properties, provided that they had been held tightly during the economic downturn, were no cause for serious concern during the 1940s. Some overdrafts were still too high but were being gradually brought down through increasing revenue. For other properties, the rehabilitation process that had begun

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<sup>55</sup> Parry, *NMA*, 176.

<sup>56</sup> Dunedin Manager's Report, 30/9/49; NMA Managers' Reports 1941-1951.

<sup>57</sup> Inspector to Dunedin, 11 July 1944, NMA Correspondence, Dunedin 1944-47, Vol. 11, 71.

from the mid-1930s was continued in the 1940s. For the N.M.A Company, Mt Earnslaw and Wyuna stations at the northern end of Lake Wakatipu, and both operated under estates, were of the most concern. Mt Earnslaw was considered to be the most problematic high country station on the N.M.A.'s Dunedin books, being under 'careless and extravagant management', continually absorbing capital, whilst making no headway.<sup>58</sup> The freehold country of lower river flats, critical in supporting the mountainous high country, was infested with rabbits and the run was only half stocked, a serious concern on a backcountry property. Wyuna Station was likewise plagued by rabbits, carried too many older sheep, resulting in lower wool yields and higher death rates, and the two eldest Hume sons, as managers for their father's estate, showed no genuine interest in the property as they considered they were just working for the N.M.A.<sup>59</sup>

At the southern end of the lake, Donald Reid & Co. attempted to place Greenvale Station on a profitable footing. The run had been revalued in 1937, and new licenses issued for 21-years at a rental of £460, a reduction of £90 on the previous rental. In 1943 Donald Reid and Co. requested a further reduction in rent. The report on Greenvale, undertaken by Crown Ranger, J.M. Macdonald in 1944, was for the first time critical of the pastoral subdivision carried out on the southern Wakatipu runs in the early 1920s. During this process, Greenvale was 'something of a chopping block', with the only good hogget country 'sacrificed to Cainard' and 'some of the best agricultural land was taken away'.<sup>60</sup> Prior to subdivision, the flock, during the fall muster, was driven along the faces of the Mataura River to the lower winter country. With that country granted to Cainard, all stock were now forced over a 3,700ft saddle, 'a desperate expedient where ewes and lambs are concerned'. Greenvale's fleece weight over the late 1930s was dismal, averaging 5 ¾ lbs per wether and only 3½ lbs per ewe.<sup>61</sup> Like Donald Reid & Co's argument nine years earlier, Macdonald considered Greenvale little better than a wether proposition. A reduction of half of the

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<sup>58</sup> N.M.A. Dunedin Branch Manager's Report, 31/3/48; NMA Managers' Reports, 1941-1951, Box 278, (UN-028), NMA Records, Hocken Library.

<sup>59</sup> Report on Wyuna, 12 September 1944; NMA GM, Dunedin Inward Letters, 1943-47, Box 152, NMA Records. Two years later, when the youngest Hume son reached the age of twenty-one, the Estate was dissolved and the Wyuna leasehold was officially transferred to William Hume.

<sup>60</sup> J.M. Macdonald's report on Runs 323 & 541, 24 April 1944; 490/358; PRL 490 Greenvale.

<sup>61</sup> Field Inspector to CCL, Southland, 23 May 1941; 490/326; PRL 490 Greenvale.

current rent, to £230 per annum, was considered reasonable and eventually approved.<sup>62</sup>

Undoubtedly the rent debate, right throughout the twentieth century, assumed greater importance than warranted and was perhaps too readily blamed for the uneconomic position of some runs. John Adams of Cainard Station told the 1949 Sheep Industry Commission that rent was not such a big factor as snow losses and high wages and that the country wanted more than simply a reduction in rent. In his case £100 pounds off the rental would not make much difference and even if rent were wiped out completely it would still not put some runs on an economic basis.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless all high country witnesses naturally agreed that token rents were preferable to the advantage of both the farmer and the land. W.P. McDonald of the High Country Section of the Otago branch of Federated Farmers, thought that runs that had to 'buy in' to maintain their flock, such as those in the Wakatipu, should be the first to have their holdings granted at a nominal rental: 'here you have all the high country problems accentuated to their highest degree – foot mustering, snow and kea losses, labour difficulties, and household amenities at their lowest'.<sup>64</sup> Doug Rowe, as President of the Wakatipu Branch of Federated Farmers believed that 'some of the rents are too high for the country the tenants are working' and that it would be better to have token rents in order to keep the high country in production 'and to retain men on it who have the husbandry of the properties at heart'.<sup>65</sup>

The High Country Committee preferred to deal with the rent question in terms of how it had contributed to the deterioration and depletion of the indigenous pastures. The Committee highlighted the profit motive of the Crown towards the high country and in doing so the Crown was culpable for the condition of the high country:

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<sup>62</sup> J.M. Macdonald's report on Runs 323 & 541, 24 April 1944; 490/358; PRL 490 Greenvale.

McDonald's report was supported by the Lands Department Field Inspector, Alexander Duthie, who also pointed out that the type of country, altitude and climate demanded a finer woolled sheep than that presently carried and, once again, the elimination of the ewe flock.; A Duthie to CCL, Southland, 25 July 1944; 490/366; PRL 490 Greenvale.

<sup>63</sup> John Adams Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 12P.2.

<sup>64</sup> W.P. McDonald Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 12D-4.

<sup>65</sup> Doug Rowe Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 12Z.1

These evils of deterioration and depletion have thus been unwittingly born and nurtured in the process of the occupation of the land. There can, of course, be no denying that the motive for occupation has always been the profit motive - the motive that has activated all industrial development in this, or any other, country. The owner of the land, the Crown, shared this motive with the tenant, and has always endeavoured to obtain, in the form of rent, the greatest possible revenue from its land. The tenant in turn has endeavoured to obtain the greatest revenue he could, subject to the terms and conditions of his lease or license, and with the uncertainty of the future in view. Therefore the landlord and tenant have been partners, for good or evil, in all aspects of our High Country problems.<sup>66</sup>

Following the Depression-induced overstocking on many runs during the 1930s, the condition of tussock lands in large areas of Central Otago were at their lowest point by the 1940s. On some runs in the Wakatipu, several years of inefficient management, or even neglect, had resulted in a different type of deterioration - the gradual regeneration of tussock, accumulation of tussock litter, and the introduction of other unpalatable vegetation to render areas of grazing country impassable and unpalatable to stock. Doug Rowe of Coronet Peak Station described his run as 'a mass of tussock from one end to the other' when he took it over in 1941.<sup>67</sup> He was in no doubt that areas, not fired for some years, needed to 'have some burns put in early, both from the point of view of utilising country now wasted and also for fire break purposes'.<sup>68</sup> By 1947 he thought it needed burnt again, as 'you can hardly walk through it'. On Loch Linnhe Station, the new leaseholder William Lott applied to burn 'rough tussock and young scrub' and if not done quickly he would soon 'not be able to get through the place'.<sup>69</sup> According to official files, only a handful of applications to burn tussock were lodged with the district Land Boards during the 1930 and 1940s. Much of the burning was carried out on high summer basins where tussock had become overgrown, unpalatable to stock and posed a fire risk. Two large basins under Mt Aurum itself were burnt in 1939, as sheep would no longer venture into them for the

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<sup>66</sup> Report of the High Country Committee, First Session on 20 November 1947, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 2.

<sup>67</sup> Doug Rowe Evidence. 12Z.1

<sup>68</sup> Doug Rowe to CCL, Otago, 31 July 1941; Folio 196; PR 1853 Vol. III, Coronet Peak, LINZ ChCh.

<sup>69</sup> William Lott to CCL, Otago, 18 July 1948; PR 1924 Vol. I 354A 1911-1959; LINZ ChCh.



‘dead snow grass and silver tussock’.<sup>70</sup> Patch burning was also done on the higher portions of Mt Creighton and Ben Lomond to clear ‘tussock roughage’.<sup>71</sup> In front of the Royal Commission in 1947 and 1948 the issue of burning and tussock land deterioration came second to questions of economic viability and tenure. Even the Commissioners themselves offered little new on the subject, instead endorsing large parts of the 1920 Pastoral Lands Commission’s report.<sup>72</sup>

### **The High Country Committee and the 1949 Royal Commission on the Sheep-Farming Industry**

By the late 1930s, recurrent economic and climatic adversity, and the anxiety and uncertainty it caused, had fostered solidarity among runholders from Marlborough to Southland. To discuss the future of the industry, a meeting of runholders from across the South Island was held at Lake Tekapo in April 1939 and then again the following year. At the 1940 meeting a proposal was put to the Minister of Lands, Frank Langstone, that a separate high country land board for pastoral and small grazing runs be established or alternatively a tribunal to review and revalue pastoral rents. Since the 1920s, the Land Boards and the Lands and Survey Department, with few practical farmers among their ranks, had been frequently accused of failing understanding the high country’s unique challenges and problems. The Minister of Lands, however, rejected the idea of separate land boards, but consented to the creation of an advisory board consisting of high country runholders from each of the provincial land districts. He also agreed to appoint a high country farmer to each land board as a seat became vacant.<sup>73</sup> Thus the High Country Committee (HCC) was born. John Mackenzie of Walter Peak, who had been a long serving chairman of the Wakatipu Sheepowners’ Union and a delegate to the Sheepowners’ Federation, was one of eight men appointed to the committee and then, in 1942, took up a seat on the Southland Land Board. The creation of the HCC in 1940 was one of the greatest political victories for runholders. It did not, however, diminish the importance of the local and regional sheepowners’ unions, and these were still the primary forums for Wakatipu

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<sup>70</sup> J.D. Baird to CCL, Otago, 21 September 1939; Folio 65; PR 1852 Vol. 2 Mt Aurum; W.P. McDonald to CCL, Otago, 31 August 1942; Folio 225; PR 1931 Vol. 2 Ben Lomond.

<sup>71</sup> Key Brothers to CCL, Otago, 24 July 1939; P 107, Mt Creighton.

<sup>72</sup> Report: Royal Commission on the Sheep-Farming Industry, 98-105.

<sup>73</sup> McLeod, ‘The High Country Committee – An Early History’, 78.

runholders to express their concerns and protect their interests. When the Sheepowners' and Farmers' unions amalgamated in 1944 as Federated Farmers, the Committee became known as the High Country Committee of Federated Farmers.

Ever since the 1939 Commission had been aborted, the hope of a thorough investigation into the sheep farming industry was kept alive by runholders. It was given further urgency during the 1940s as fixed wool prices during the war kept the industry depressed. In 1947, mainly due to the representations of the poorer hill-country farmers of the North Island, a new Royal Commission into the Sheep Farming Industry was announced. Heartening for runholders was the appointment of Willis Scaife, owner of Glendhu Station, Wanaka, and a former committee member of the HCC, to the Commission. During the Commission's sittings over 1947 and 1948, the HCC presented the main points of the runholders' case in Wellington, while further localised evidence was supplied by runholders at regional sittings. Some of the points raised by the HCC, such as pastoral rent, soil conservation, good husbandry and the rehabilitation of returned soldiers, have been referred to earlier. Likewise, the concerns expressed by the Wakatipu runholders were those that they had been dealing with over the previous two decades. This included shortage of experienced labour, high wage and transport costs, the burden of high rentals, the scarcity of replacement stock, the lack of winter country, and the problem of keas. One of the runholders' most urgent requests was for the creation of a tax-free fund to provide against snow losses and economic downturns. After successive economic and environmental crises, a measure of stabilisation in pastoral incomes was required both in order to put the industry back on a firm footing and to protect against future shocks. The Commissioner's approval of such an idea, in both its interim and final reports, eventually led to the establishment of the Snow Loss Reserve Scheme in 1954.<sup>74</sup>

Regarding pastoral tenure, the HCC's evidence centred on four points: namely, that tenants should have their improvements safeguarded; good husbandry should be encouraged rather than enforced; poorly subdivided runs should be regrouped; and a tribunal to protect runholders' rights should be established. The HCC's evidence was well received and the Commission's report, released in 1949, was a success for

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<sup>74</sup> This legislation was introduced as part of the 1954 Land and Income Tax Act.

runholders, even if several of their requests had already been given effect the previous year in the 1948 Land Act.

A primary concern was the insufficient protection for improvements on pastoral runs. This, according to runholders, was the root of the reluctance to invest in the high country. Men were unwilling to pay for the improvements on pastoral runs for fear of losing their capital when their lease expired. This insecurity had ramifications for the employment of labour, as runholders were unwilling to build accommodation for married men for fear of losing their outlay. As opposed to single men, the presence of married couples on stations had added social benefits, creating 'a community spirit with some social atmosphere and lighten the heartbreaking burden of labour and loneliness for the wives of the occupiers'.<sup>75</sup> To correct the situation, the HCC requested that if there was no immediate incoming tenant at the termination of the lease, the Crown should take over and pay for all permanent improvements upon the property.<sup>76</sup> According to the HCC, 'this would do more to restore confidence in the high country than any single action the Government could take'.<sup>77</sup> On this point, however, the Commissioners were presented with a *fait accompli* as the perpetually renewable pastoral lease under the 1948 Land Act 'reasonably provided' security for improvements.<sup>78</sup>

The question of regrouping subdivided and uneconomic runs was a perennial issue. In the Wakatipu, while few runs had been subdivided, the past eighty years of settlement had seen a gradual encroachment onto some runs' traditional winter grazing blocks. On Ben Lomond Station, all the frontage of the Ben Lomond peak overlooking Queenstown, to around one-third its height, was occupied by 'various settlers', while the tops were left to the runholder. On a holding of 32,000 acres Ben Lomond Station contained just twelve acres of ploughable land. As the runholder and Chairman of the Otago Federated Farmers' High Country Committee, W.P. McDonald said, 'that puts me in the ridiculous position of having to buy all my fodder for horses and stock

<sup>75</sup> Evidence of the HCC, Second Session, 20 November 1947, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Evidence was given on the Crown practice of offering pastoral runs at a fixed rent and loaded with improvements, valued by the Crown. If the property failed to find a tenant, the value of improvements was reduced but the rent remained the same. Therefore the equity of the Crown was maintained while that of the old tenant was reduced.

<sup>77</sup> Evidence of the HCC, First Session, 19 November 1947, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Report: Royal Commission on the Sheep-Farming Industry, 76.

generally in the winter. It seems reasonable that there should be more frontage area for such a huge area of high country'.<sup>79</sup> Other runs in the locality, including Mt Aurum and Coronet Peak were in a similar position of having little arable land but an abundance of country for summer grazing. The task of regrouping or providing winter country was highlighted as a task for a high country tribunal. Once again the idea of a tribunal, consisting of a magistrate and a representative of the Crown and of runholders, to adjudicate on matters of rent, valuations, and the regrouping of was raised during the Commission's hearings. By the time of the Commission's report, however, a Valuation of Land Court had been established which was regarded as fulfilling this purpose.

A feature of the 1949 Commission was the greater discussion on some of the social difficulties in the high country. A fear commonly expressed in the hearings of the 1949 Royal Commission, was that in a quickly developing and modernising urban post-war New Zealand, those in rural localities, and especially in the high country, were being overlooked with regards to the provision of modern amenities. Of course they appreciated the difficulties and in some cases impracticality of providing services to widely scattered properties, but many homesteads in the late 1940s still had limited road access, only rudimentary forms of electrical generation (or none at all), and unreliable telecommunications. During the Commission's hearings, runholders liked to emphasise the uniqueness of the New Zealand high country, both as a place and a way of life. The report of the High Country Committee maintained the ruralist ideal that, 'the country is the best and healthiest place for rearing children and if New Zealand is to increase its population, rural amenities must be improved and extended'.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, W.P. McDonald of Ben Lomond Station told the Commissioners:

It has been said that the high country farmer is the last of the pioneering type. This is true not only of the runholder, but all those connected with the high country. You have a splendid type of citizen who is prepared to face untold inconveniences because of his love of the free calling his life provides. The offspring of this type is important to New Zealand and it is the duty of the

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<sup>79</sup> W.P. McDonald – Further Evidence Presented to Commission, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 13K.1

<sup>80</sup> Evidence of the HCC, First Session on 20 November 1947, H.J. Wardell Papers, Volume 2.

government to see that these children are in no way handicapped as regards their education.<sup>81</sup>

At the Commission's Queenstown sitting, Mrs. Alexander Burnett of Halfway Bay Station spoke of the problem of education in the high country. As she saw it, runholding families had four options available for education - sending children to boarding school, lessons by correspondence, leaving the high country and moving to an urban center, or simply not having children. Boarding school was considered too expensive and was not suitable for young children. Lessons by correspondence on the other hand were of value to older children but teaching methods were quickly changing and mothers often found little time to teach among other domestic tasks. The allowance of 10s per week for secondary school education was also seen as totally inadequate. It was enough 'to buy socks for about a fortnight' Mrs Burnett chided.<sup>82</sup> It cost the Key family of Mt Creighton Station £105 per annum, after education allowance, for board and boat fares for the primary schooling of their three children.<sup>83</sup> The High Country Committee called for the Government to cover the actual cost of board for rural children attending primary or secondary school, and an allowance be made for children taught at home by a teacher, or if taught by the mother, for a domestic assistant to be employed.<sup>84</sup> These recommendations were taken up by the Commission and in their final report recommended that the weekly allowance for rural children attending secondary school as boarders be increased from 10s to £1 per week and for mother-teachers providing correspondence lessons to receive 10s per week per child.<sup>85</sup>

Reticulation was seen as the greatest assistance to the rural housewife. Some stations, such as Rees Valley, had installed their own electric plants, but several homesteads, as Doug Rowe pointed out, could not get power despite being within close range of the main road.<sup>86</sup> W.P. McDonald stated the case for greater reticulation in the Wakatipu: 'The back-country farmer's wife, with no hope of domestic help and with an unavoidable share of helping in the farm production, surely deserves prior

<sup>81</sup> W.P McDonald Evidence given at Wanaka, 19 March 1948, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 12D.4.

<sup>82</sup> Mrs A. Burnett Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10, 13G-3.

<sup>83</sup> IL Key to CCL, Otago, 8 October 1945; P107, Mt Creighton 1936-1961; LINZ, ChCh.

<sup>84</sup> Evidence of the HCC, First Session on 20 November 1947, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Report: Royal Commission on the Sheep-Farming Industry, 137-138.

<sup>86</sup> Doug Rowe Evidence, H.J. Wardell Papers, Vol. 10.



Mr and Mrs A Burnett, Cecil Peak Station. The Burnett family of Halfway Bay supervised the neighbouring Cecil Peak Station for many years while owned by L.G.D. Acland. Alexander Munro Burnett (above) bought Cecil Peak in 1948.



Fig. (5.4)

Gordon Boyd, Cecil Peak, 1947.

Both Photos: J Burnett, Jnr.  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

consideration in the attaining of electric power. In other words, rural reticulation should be sped up as much as possible'. The Commission largely agreed and noted that efforts in this direction were being attempted through the Rural Reticulation Act, which established a fund to assist with the provision of electricity in country areas.<sup>87</sup>

### **The 1948 Land Act and Beyond**

In 1948 the Land Act was thoroughly revised, replacing the 1924 Land Act and its amendments. The peculiar feature of this legislation was that it came amidst the hearings of the Royal Commission, much to the disgust of the commissioners themselves. As High Country Committee Chairmen David McLeod saw it, 'it seemed obvious that the Lands and Survey Department was determined to show how ill-fitting the committee's criticisms were when they were preparing such an enlightened piece of legislation'.<sup>88</sup> The Act saw the abolition of the pastoral license and small grazing license and the introduction of the pastoral lease for land classified as suitable or adaptable only for pastoral purposes.<sup>89</sup> The new tenure had several features in common with the old license, such as a good husbandry clause and restrictions on burning and cultivation, but also some important differences. Most importantly the right to freehold was removed and instead the lessee was granted a lease of 33 years with perpetual rights of renewal. This improved, at least, the 'feeling' of security for runholders. The old Land Boards were superseded by the Land Settlement Board, which was to determine a 'fair annual rent' and could impose restrictions on the number of stock that might be carried.

The Land Act and the wool boom were the two immediate events that brought a new sense of confidence and degree of prosperity to the high country. On the horizon were several other favourable developments in the areas of pastoral science and technology that would bring about a substantial increase in the productivity of the South Island high country. This new era, however, is beyond this study's scope, and for runholders at the end of the 1940s, many doubts over the future of their industry and livelihoods

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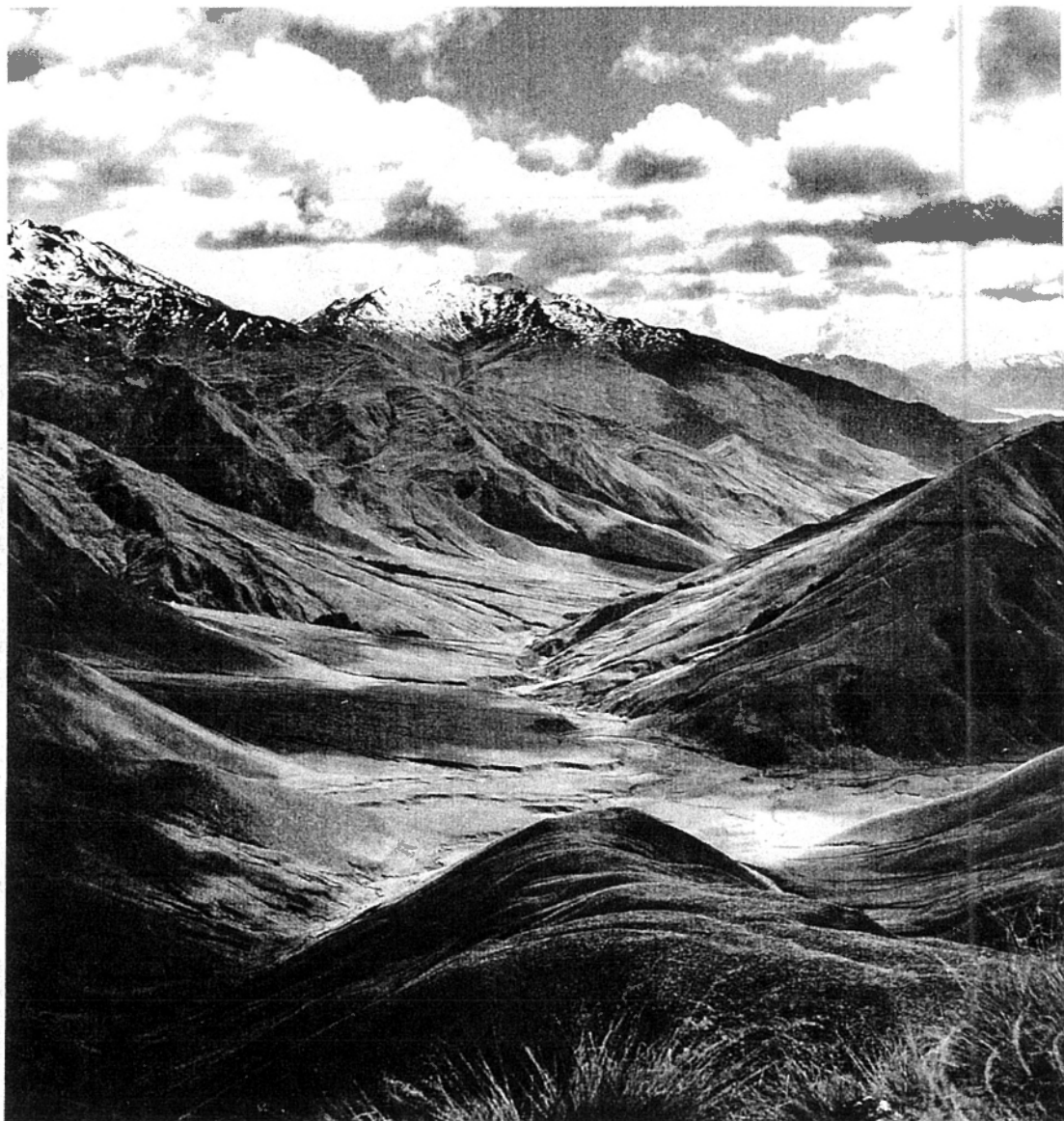
<sup>87</sup> Report: Royal Commission on the Sheep-Farming Industry, 140.

<sup>88</sup> McLeod, 'The High Country Committee – an Early History', 86.

<sup>89</sup> This was in contrast to 'farm land', land classified as suitable or adaptable for any type of farming. The Act also made provision for pastoral occupation licenses. These were subject to the same restrictions as the pastoral lease but were for a term not exceeding 21 years, with no right of renewal.

remained. Nevertheless during the 1940s runholders had attempted in various ways to adapt pastoralism to the prevailing economic and social conditions of the nation. The hearings of the Royal Commission illustrated how forceful high country farmers were in their defence of their industry and their resolve to keep their land in production. It was now the task of policy makers to weigh up the cost of providing high country farmers with the necessary legislative security, economic support and social services to keep them in production against the value of the fine-wool industry to New Zealand's economy and the consequences of allowing large areas of the high country to possibly be abandoned.





**Fig. (5.5)**

Roses Country, Motatapu Valley.

Summer grazing country on Glencoe Station. The Motatapu Run (334b) remained part of Glencoe Station until 1947. During Dr William Aitkin's ownership of Glencoe (1928-1948) the erection of a new shearing shed, yards and quarters on the northern end of the Motatapu block improved stock management, and the overall balance of the run, as stock could be mustered towards the Motatapu end. However labour shortages until the late 1940s prevented the full benefits from being obtained from these improvements.

Photo: Peter Chandler  
Peter Chandler Research Papers  
MS-1270-6-1/001, Hocken Library

## Conclusion

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In the late 1970s, Kevin O'Connor and Christopher Kerr, presented one of the most succinct summaries of the history of high country runholding up to the 1950s:

For nearly a century the high country runholder had been served roughly by nature, poorly by public administration, harshly by commerce and scantily by science. The agronomic lessons which [Leonard] Cockayne had derived from his magnificent range reseeding research in Central Otago were scarcely practicable in the persisting conditions of insecure tenure, unstable prices, insufficient fencing and uncontrolled rabbits<sup>1</sup>

This study has reinforced the popular orthodoxy that, during the first half of the twentieth century, high country runholding was a difficult livelihood, a marginal (and sometimes unprofitable) activity and extremely vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. It also qualifies and revises this story, however, by illustrating the variability of experience among runs and runholders and by showing how the various economic, environmental, social, and political aspects of runholding were tightly intertwined and interdependent. Each of these factors acted as a stimulus in the Wakatipu high country, effecting outcomes and producing wide-ranging impacts.

The geography, climate and ecology of the Wakatipu Basin was, and continues to be, the underlying basis of pastoralism's marginality as a form of land use and as a livelihood. Taken together these forces imposed several unwavering constants, exerted continuous restraints, and ultimately limited the economic possibilities and long-term sustainability of runholding. The geography of the region dictated that most runs had large areas subject to snow and little low country suitable for wintering stock on supplementary feed. Accordingly it remained an unyielding maxim that carrying capacities were determined by the available winter country. Heavy snow was an ever-

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<sup>1</sup> K.F. O'Connor & I.G.C. Kerr, 'The History and Present Pattern of Pastoral Range Production in New Zealand', in *Proceedings of the First International Rangeland Congress, Denver, August 1978*, Donald N. Hyder (ed.), (Denver: Society for Range Management, 1978), 107.

present danger and struck the Wakatipu Basin on nine occasions between 1900 and 1950. A higher than average mortality rate and enough ewes only sufficient to maintain the flock, largely excluded the sale of surplus stock. An inability to diversify income meant the sole source of income on most properties was from the sale of wool, leaving runholders open to wide variations in annual income as prices fluctuated. Unimproved tussock range persisted as the primary resource base of 'exploitative' pastoralism with little or no input back into the land for the 'augmentation, maintenance or replacement' of native plants. By 1950 some areas of the Wakatipu high country had been almost continually grazed and periodically burnt, for over eighty years. Rabbit control remained an annual, and sometimes expensive, cost of production while rabbit numbers fluctuated according to the demand for skins and availability of labour. Grassland deterioration through burning, grazing, rabbits and weeds steadily reduced carrying capacities, as did economic stringencies and snow losses. The nature of pastoral tenure ensured that investment remained principally in the stock, rather than the land, and stations continued to be operated on the bare minimum of plant, improvements and labour. If these represented some of the constraints over pastoralism, much of this thesis has dealt with the ways in which runholders sought to overcome, or more likely, work within these limitations, in a continual endeavour to remain economically viable.

With runholding being fundamentally a capitalist activity, wool prices often acted as the major prompt, resulting not only in uncertainty of income but broader environmental, social and political change. This was most clearly seen for much of the 1930s and 1940s, where runholders were in 'survival mode'. Pastoralists had no sooner come out of the price abyss of the early 1930s, and set about clearing arrears of rent and interest, when they were compelled to accept wartime prices at a barely remunerative level. So long as prices were low, it was impossible to accumulate capital reserves for effecting maintenance and improvements, making allowance for snow losses, or the purchase of stock. The increasing overhead costs of materials, transport and labour in the face of a static income squeezed profit margins further. Trying to offset reduced income by carrying more stock, coupled with a declining market for aged stock, placed greater pressure on native pastures, increased losses in severe winters and brought lower wool yields. With the drift of young men away from the countryside to urban centres and World War Two taking many from the hills,

labour became increasingly scarce and expensive. Attention to flocks and the control of rabbits, goats, keas and weeds was neglected, often at the expense of the vegetation and soil. Management inefficiencies also served to reduce productivity. Difficult areas of country were retired from grazing, fence lines fell into disrepair allowing stock to wander, and incomplete autumn musters left sheep on high country to succumb to winter snow. By the end of the 1940s a malaise hung over the high country. It was a time scarcely opportune for large-scale improvement of plant and pasture. Confidence and investment in farming required a measure of price stability and a degree of certainty, neither of which were present. Few with the necessary capital were prepared to invest in the high country, leaving some deteriorating and unoccupied runs to be taken up by men long in experience but short on finance.

The high country, its environment and its occupiers, were not served well by legislation between 1900 and 1948. Although runholders too readily blamed insecurity of tenure for many of the ills of the high country, central government exhibited little vision or direction in regards to the future of the high country between 1900 and 1948. The assortment of Land Acts and their amendments did, on an ad hoc basis, attempt to alleviate many of the unsatisfactory aspects of pastoral tenure, but alterations were generally in response to ecological and economic changes in the high country. For instance, the enforcement of stocking limits had been quietly advocated as early as 1905, more forcefully in 1920, but were not implemented until 1941. Even the 1948 Land Act can be seen as an attempt by the Lands Department to forestall the trenchant criticism of its administration of the high country that emanated from the sittings of the Royal Commission on the Sheep Farming Industry in 1947 and 1948.

Always present in the operation of a high country run was the stock agent, whose role in providing credit, supplies and advice to runholders must be acknowledged. As was shown in chapter three, even during the prosperous but volatile 1920s, most pastoral clients of the N.M.A.'s carried a certain amount of debt from season to season. The ability of runholders to carry on during the 1930s was largely dependent on their credit-worthiness and the willingness of the stock agent to continue to support them. The N.M.A., of whom most is known about, stood by their pastoral clients in the Wakatipu but held accounts and overdrafts very tightly. This was often as much for their own security, which was weak or non-existent, as it was for the good of the

farmer. It was also not uncommon for agents, once economic conditions improved, to attempt to place uneconomic properties on a better footing.

Recurrent economic and environmental adversity had by the 1940s fostered solidarity among runholders from Marlborough to Southland. Although the regional Sheepowners' Union was established in 1903, runholders in the Wakatipu were, in 1919, among the first to establish a coherent local community of interest to address the issues facing their industry and more especially in their own region. The political successes of runholders were, particularly in the 1940s, disproportionate to their numbers and, arguably, their economic importance. Runholders became quite adept at using their own persuasive high country mythology to influence policy makers. Within Otago and Southland the Wakatipu runholders led the assault against the 'kea menace'. With support from other districts, the influence of a comparatively small number of farmers on the flanks of the Southern Alps successfully secured the state sanctioned and subsidised slaughter of one of New Zealand's most iconic birds. From 1935 several political achievements were secured under a supposedly unsympathetic Labour Government. Their crowning achievement was the establishment of the High Country Committee in 1940 to act as an advisory body to the Minister of Lands with regards to the high country's unique problems and challenges.

Assessing the broader environmental change in the Wakatipu high country has been difficult, thus making any conclusions somewhat tentative. The writings of contemporary grassland scientists tended to focus more on the drier and more denuded areas of the high country. Sheep returns for twenty-five individual stations are comprehensive only till 1938. As was seen in chapter five, the decline in some flock sizes by the end of the 1940s had as much to do with climatic adversity, economic stringency, labour scarcity and inefficient management as a deteriorating resource base. Successive Royal Commissions illustrated that runholders were aware, from an early stage, of the benefits of fencing, spelling, surface sowing and cultivation. Some attempts were made in these directions, particularly during the first two decades of the century, but such programmes were atypical owing to capital limitations and tenure insecurity.

Snow remained the greatest environmental threat to the runholders' livelihood. In this regard, environmental learning on how to best cope was through costly, and sometimes bitter, experience. Runholders were well aware of the benefits of fencing and cultivation to minimise winter losses and in particular the Mackenzies of Walter Peak used these techniques to great effect. Yet for many runholders in the Wakatipu fencing off the summer from the winter country was both financially and logistically impracticable and with little or no available agricultural land, cultivating winter-feed was impossible. Instead, when the barometer plummeted, they relied on the experience of previous snowfalls to know which areas were the safest for stock; where sheep needed to be hunted down; which faces were first to clear of snow and provide feed; and where sheep were likely to drift and camp when caught in snowstorms.

Tussock burning, one major agent of vegetation change in the high country, has been the focus of recent scholarship. Writers have argued that nineteenth century pastoralists were generally more discriminate in their use of fire than popular belief would suggest.<sup>2</sup> As this study has shown the practice of largely discriminate burning was carried over into the twentieth century. The 1920 Southern Pastoral Lands Commission illustrated that the continued acceptance and use of fire was prevalent among Wakatipu pastoralists but that burning of tussock was, apparently, done within commonly subscribed parameters regarding the proper aspect, altitude and season. Evidently the principals of 'judicious burning' as propounded in the 1920 Commission's report, and which became the orthodoxy for burning for the next two decades, were already largely developed by runholders through experience and were, publicly at least, widely adhered to.

Whereas studies on burning in nineteenth century pastoralism have relied on station diary accounts and memoirs, this study has been able, from 1922, to use official consents of burning issued to runholders by Land Boards as a guide to the extent and

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Peden, "The Exceeding Joy of Burning"- Pastoralists and the Lucifer Match: Burning the Rangelands of the South Island of New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century, 1850 to 1890', *Agricultural History*, 80:1, (2006), 17-34; Peter Holland, Kevin O'Connor, and Alexander Wearing, 'Remaking the Grasslands of the Open County', in Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking eds., *Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78-79.

frequency of fire as a pasture management tool.<sup>3</sup> In line with what Robert Peden has argued, most requests demonstrate that burning was done for specific reasons, either to clear rank or dead tussock that had become unpalatable to sheep, to protect the run from accidental summer-time fires, or to clear ground of tussock, fern and scrub in preparation for the surface sowing of exotic pastures. Land Boards generally consented, leaving the timing and ultimate scale of burning to the best judgement of the runholder. The fact that there was a great deal of variability in the use of fire among the runs indicates that the practice was mainly dependent on the attitude of runholder or manager concerned. In most years no burning was done at all and some runs, it appears, remained unburnt for as much as forty-years. Where burning was carried out, it was generally performed on a requisite basis.

Run ownership was a mixture of change and resilience. Frequent transfers of pastoral licenses, and the short-term ownership of pastoral runs was a distinctive feature of the Wakatipu high country in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Inter-family transfers were also most frequent during this period, and again in the 1940s as a new generation of runholders took over. Inter-generational transfers were most likely to occur on runs with a lengthy period of occupation by a single family and where male offspring had grown up and worked on the station. An indication of the regularity of license changes is illustrated by the fact that in 1925, the Mackenzies of Walter Peak were the only nineteenth century runholders still present in the Wakatipu and, by 1950, the only family to remain in continuous possession of a property for the entire study period.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, many properties - Halfway Bay, Rees Valley, Kawarau Falls, Glen Nevis, Cainard, Closeburn, The Branches, and Wyuna - remained within families for at least twenty years or more and were passed between generations. Individual runholders, such as William Elliot of Birchdale, Huntly Groves of Routeburn, L.G.D. Acland of Cecil Peak and the Shaws of Elfin Bay,

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<sup>3</sup> It is again necessary to qualify these conclusions given that burning may have been done surreptitiously by some runholders, that some requests to burn were inadvertently left out of official files or that from the late 1940s the authority for issuing burning permits was taken over by regional Catchment Boards.

<sup>4</sup> This specifically refers to the Walter Peak block, held by the Mackenzies from the 1880s to the 1950s. The Mt Nicholas run, bought by the family in 1905 along with Fernhill, was sold in 1949. One might also include the McCormicks of Closeburn. Peter McCormick took over the run in 1903 from his brother-in-law E.A. Cameron, and the property remained in the McCormick family until the 1960s.

retained ownership for periods of up to thirty years. Ownership became more stable from the 1930s as the demand for pastoral runs declined.

There was no appreciable change in the socio-economic backgrounds of the runholders of the Wakatipu. The nature of the occupation demanded that experience was almost essential and legislation aimed to ensure sufficient experience was a prerequisite to holding a pastoral license. The predominance of practical shepherd-runholders among high country lessees, a pattern initiated in the 1880s and 1890s, was maintained and unchallenged throughout the period. Most who entered into runholding were experienced in the high country, possessed moderate capital resources, and were reliant as ever on credit from mercantile agencies. For this reason most stations remained owner-managed and family orientated. The ability to provide station labour through one's family had always been an advantage but became a significant factor when labour shortages became acute from the 1930s onward. In a modernising country, it was becoming increasingly unacceptable for the high country family to accept a standard of living that was rapidly falling behind their urban counterparts. The provision of household amenities and education had become the biggest social problems for the high country by the 1940s. No longer were families, and in particular housewives, prepared to accept, in a nation of reticulation, telephones and motorcars, a standard of living little advanced of those who had first settled the high country.

In 1950, just as in 1900, high country farming was the dominant land use of the high country surrounding Lake Wakatipu. Increasingly however it was being called into question, not only by man but also by commerce, science and the environment. To the outsider, seemingly beset with problems on all sides, runholding had little to commend it. Yet for the families of the high country, content to carry on growing fine wools, it was precisely these threats to their livelihood and their way of life that spurred them into action. It would be a theme that would reoccur time and again in subsequent decades. As tough as times seemed, however, the South Island high country was on the cusp of a new era by the end of the 1940s. Kevin O'Connor and Chris Kerr again sum up the entrance of this new period:



With a decade of the passing of the 1948 Land Act, everything changed for the better. Secure tenures with fair rents, rights of lease renewal or rights to compensation for improvements on disposal, responsibility for good husbandry and limitations on livestock numbers augured well for justice to both man and land. The 1951 wool boom made income available for investment. Co-ordinated war on the rabbit made investment in range improvement feasible. Research showed that legumes could be established by sod-sowing from aerial sowing with correction of sulphur, phosphorus and molybdenum deficiencies. Water and soil conservation run plans gave incentives for putting this research into practice.<sup>5</sup>

This assessment by O'Connor and Kerr, along with the one earlier, are broadly representative of the history of the high country. Nevertheless, the common dualistic representation of a dismal pre-1948 and bright post-1948 era in runholding has verged on being somewhat one-dimensional. Undoubtedly advancements in technology and agricultural science, a greater understanding of tussock grasslands and more efficient pastoral management practices brought dividends to runholders, but the same environmental and economic constraints that had dealt harshly with runholders over the first half of the twentieth century remained. Rather than the post-1948 era being some kind of triumph of pastoralism after years of defeat, it is more accurate to view this shift as another 'turning of the economic wheel'. In this regard, one cannot overlook the continuities between the pre-1948 and the post-1948 history of the high country. In the same way as runholders all too frequently discovered over the first half of the twentieth century, fine wool growing would continue to be exposed as a livelihood susceptible to the vagaries of the weather and international markets.

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<sup>5</sup> O'Connor & Kerr, 'The History and Present Pattern of Pastoral Range Production in New Zealand', 107.

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#### **Department of Lands, Invercargill District Office - Southland Land Tenure Case Files (DABW/18837/D86)**

Cainard Station

- DABW/18837/D86/101b PRL 413 1 1903-1933
- DABW/18837/D86/101c PRL 413 2 1933-1946

Cecil Peak Station

- DAAI/18837/D85/159f PRL 387 1895-1947

Elfin Bay Station

- DABW/18837/D86/107e PRL 466 1909-1933
- DABW/18837/D86/110f PRL 512 1933-1955

Greenvale Station

- DABW/18837/D86/101a PRL 412 1911-1933
- DABW/18837/D86/109a PRL 490 1933-1948

Halfway Bay Station

- DABW/18837/D86/99h PRL 403 1904-1940

Lorne Peak Station

- DABW/18837/D86/95d PRL 316 1911-1927
- DABW/18837/D86/111e PRL 518 1928-1947
- DABW/18837/D86/111f PRL 519 1928-1943

Walter Peak Station

- DABW/18837/D86/94n PRL 264 1912-1923
- DABW/18837/D86/95h PRL 326 1912-1923
- DABW/18837/D86/92f OLM 2338 1910-1923
- DABW/18837/D86/95a PRL 299 1909-1922
- DABW/18837/D86/112b PRL 522 1923-1949

#### **Department of Justice, Court of Review of Mortgagors' Liabilities, Otago and Dunedin City Adjustment Commissions – Case Files, Adjustment Files, Applications, National Nominal Index to Case Files (DAAC/D135)**

Applications, Nos. 1500-1560 – (DAAC/D135/32)

#### **Department of Lands and Survey, Dunedin District Office – Registered Files 1883-1987 (DAAK/D84)**

Runs Register 1878-1960 (DAAK/D84 768)

Sheep Farming Commission 1939-1949 (DAAK/D84/71d 3/438)  
 General – Snowfalls in Otago 1903-1908 – Carrying Capacity of Runs in  
 Early Part of Century (DAAK/D84/72c 3/550)

**Dunedin High Court – Dunedin Probate and Letters of Administration Files (I)  
 (DAAC/9075)**

Baird, Graham Dick, Probate File, 6260, (1919), (DAAC/9075/D239/368)  
 Paterson, William, Probate File, 24241, (1910), (DAAC/9075/D239/578)

**Dunedin Supreme Court – Mortgagors' Adjustment Commission (DAAC/D437)**

Otago District Register, Nos. 1291-1692, 1937-1938 (DAAC/D437/654 5)

**Supreme/High Court, Dunedin – Otago Adjustment Commission (DAAC/D256)**

Register of Applications for Adjustment - Volume 1, Nos. 1 – 25, 1935 –1938,  
 (DAAC/D256/1061a 1)

**Invercargill High Court – Probates and Letters of Administration (DAFG/9066  
 and DAFG/9067)**

Duke, Stewart, Probate File, 4041, (1916), (DAFG/9066/D328/35)  
 McKinlay, David, Probate File, 1311, (1904), (DAFG/9066/D328/16)  
 McBride, Daniel, Probate File, 3600 (1914), (DAFG/9066/D328/31)  
 Matheson, Robert Elliot, Probate File, 193/19, (1919) (DAFG/9067/D328/47)

The Hocken Library, *Uare Taoka O Hakena*, University of Otago,  
 Dunedin

**Dickson Jardine Farm Diaries (AG-659)**

Farm Diary 1924-1927

**H.J. Wardell: Papers Relating to the Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry  
 (MS-1755)**

Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, Evidence of the High Country  
 Committee, Volume 2.

Royal Commission on the Sheep Industry, Evidence of the High Country  
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 April 1948]

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Walter Peak Ledger, 1917-1943

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NMA Correspondence, Dunedin, 1918-1936, Vols. 1-7, (Box 66)  
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 NMA GM (Colonial) – Outwards, 1921-1928, 2 Vols. (Box 25)  
 NMA GM, Dunedin Inward Letters, 1925-1927; 1939-1950, 5 Vols. (Boxes 149-153)  
 NMA Inspectors' Reports – Dunedin 1917-1942.  
 NMA Managers' Reports, 1928-1951, (Boxes 276-278)

### **Otago and Southland Sheepowners' Industrial Union of Employers: Records (MS-1039)**

List of Members as at 31 March 1951  
 Minute Book, 1903-1911  
 Minute Book, 1911-1931  
 Minute Book, 1942-1955  
 Outward Correspondence, 1908-1914

### **Peter Chandler Research Papers (MS-1270)**

Manuscripts and Related Research: Wakatipu Runs Histories and Shotover: A History (MS-1270-1-5)

‘Promised Land of Rees I’  
 ‘Promised Land of Rees II’  
 ‘Shotover, a history’

Wakatipu Runs Research: Papers and Correspondence I (MS-1270-2-1)

Runs A-B  
 Runs CA-CL  
 Runs CO-E  
 Runs F-G  
 Runs G-P  
 Runs R-S  
 Runs T-Z

Wakatipu Runs Research: Runs, Diaries and Accounts (MS-1270-2-3)

Run Diary, 1875-1987  
 Run Diary, 1859-1960

Wakatipu Runs Research: Miscellaneous (MS-1270-2-4)

Rees Valley Wool Returns 1901-1920

Wakatipu Runs Research: Family Genealogies and Charts (MS-1270-2-5)

Chart of Wakatipu Runs and their owners

Photograph Albums (MS-1270-6-1)

Photograph Album I  
 Photograph Album II

Loose Photographs (MS-1270-6-2)  
Photographs relating to runs

**Reid Farmers Ltd.: Further Records (00-121)**

Donald Reid & Co. Minute Book, 1900-1934

**Reid Farmers Ltd: Records (85-161)**

Donald Reid Correspondence – The Branches, 1916-1921 (Box 2)  
Donald Reid & Co Letter Book, 1908-1925 (Box 3)  
Donald Reid Unsecured Securities, 1933-1940 (Box 1)

**Wakatipu Sheepowners' Union Records (Misc-Ms-0278)**

Wakatipu Sheep Owners' Union Minute Book, 1919-1944

**Wright Stephenson and Co. Ltd: Land Sales Books (UN-103)**

Land Information New Zealand, *Toitu Whenua*, Christchurch

**Pastoral Run License Files**

Ben Lomond Station

PR 1931 Vol. 1 (Run 12) – 1904-1939  
PR 1931 Vol. 2 (Run 12) – 1939-1952

Birchdale Station

PR 1882 Vol. 1 (Run 417) – 1896-1945

Coronet Peak Station

PR 1853 Vol. 1 (Run 27) – 1910-1931  
PR 1853 Vol. 2 (Run 27) – 1932-1940  
PR 1853 Vol. 3 (Run 27) – 1940-1959

Glen Nevis Station

PO 201 Vol. 1 (Run 354B) – 1911-1964

Loch Linnhe Station

PR 1924 Vol. 1 (Run 354A) – 1911-1959

Mt Aurum Station

PR 1852 Vol. 1 (Runs 13, 15, 16) – 1901-1936  
PR 1852 Vol. 2 (Runs 13, 16, 16) – 1936- 1956

Mt Creighton Station

PR 1278 (Runs 9, 9a) - 1902-1924  
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## IV: Maps

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Miscellaneous Collection of Five Maps: Map of Shotover Survey District, 1923, OT59

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## **V: Newspapers**

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